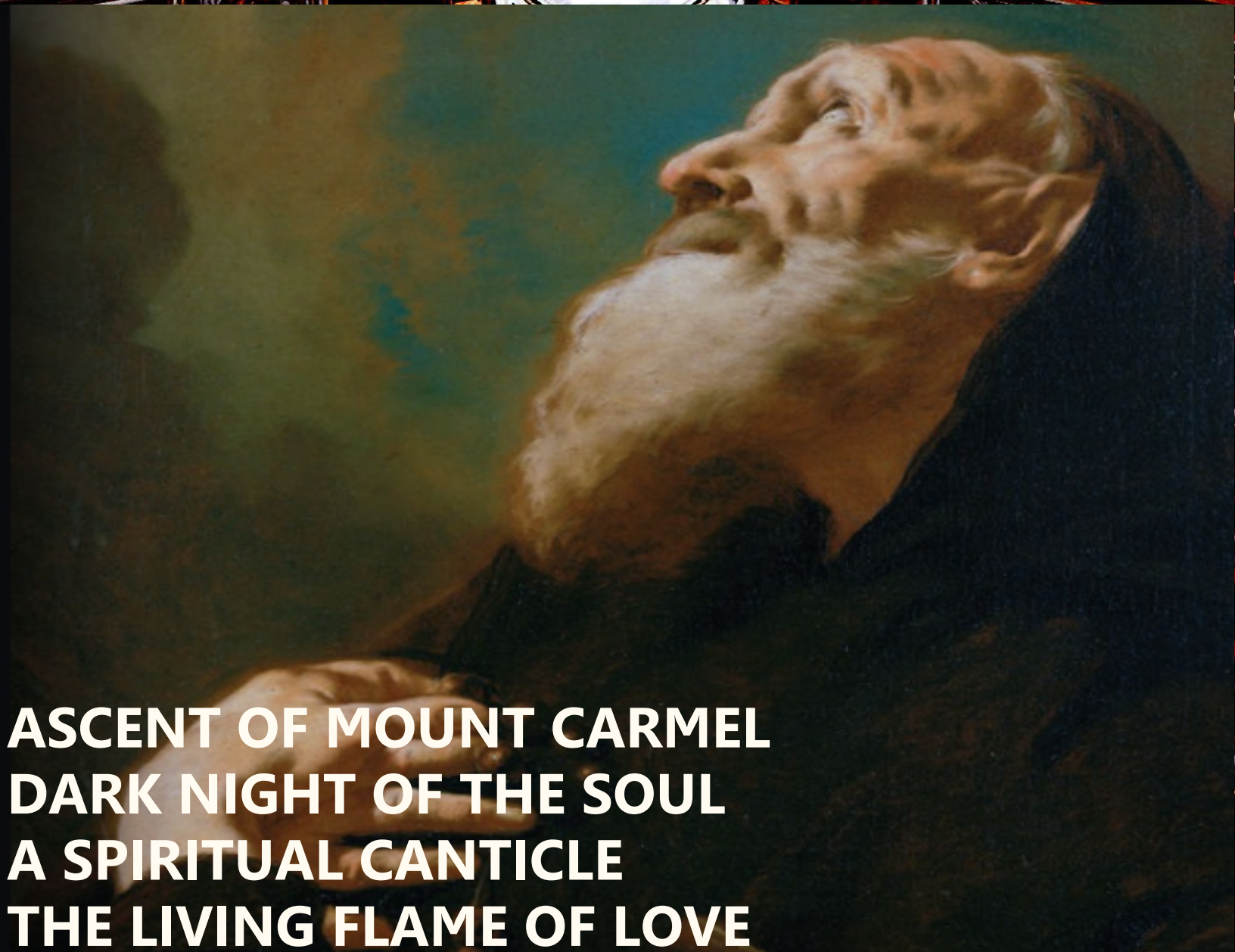


# **ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS**

## **SANTA CRUZ COLLECTION**



**ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL**  
**DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL**  
**A SPIRITUAL CANTICLE**  
**THE LIVING FLAME OF LOVE**

SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

# ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL

*by*

*Saint John of the Cross*

DOCTOR OF THE CHURCH

*THIRD REVISED EDITION*

*Translated and edited,  
with a General Introduction, by*

E. ALLISON PEERS

*from the critical edition of*

P. SILVERIO DE SANTA TERESA, C.D.

NIHIL OBSTAT: GEORGIVS SMITH, S.T.D., PH.D.

CENSOR DEPVSTATVS

IMPRIMATVR: E. MORROGH BERNARD

VICARIVS GENERALIS

WESTMONASTERII: DIE XXIV SEPTEMBRIS MCMLII

TO THE  
DISCALCED CARMELITES OF CASTILE,  
WITH ABIDING MEMORIES OF THEIR HOSPITALITY AND KINDNESS  
IN MADRID, AVILA AND BURGOS,  
BUT ABOVE ALL OF THEIR DEVOTION TO  
SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS,  
I DEDICATE THIS TRANSLATION

## CONTENTS

PREFACE TO THE ELECTONIC EDITION.....	6
TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE .....	11
TO THE SECOND EDITION .....	11
AN OUTLINE OF THE LIFE OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS .....	13
GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS .....	16
DATES AND METHODS OF COMPOSITION. ....	16
GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS.....	16
OUTSTANDING QUALITIES AND DEFECTS OF THE SAINT'S STYLE .....	27
DIFFUSION OF THE WRITINGS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS -- LOSS OF THE AUTOGRAPHS -- GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANUSCRIPTS.....	29
INTEGRITY OF THE SAINT'S WORK -- INCOMPLETE CONDITION OF THE 'ASCENT' AND THE 'NIGHT' -- DISPUTED QUESTIONS.....	32
HISTORY OF THE PUBLICATION OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS'S WRITINGS -- THE FIRST EDITION.....	36
DENUNCIATION OF THE 'WORKS' TO THE INQUISITION -- DEFENCE OF THEM MADE BY FR. BASILO PONCE DE LEÎN -- EDITIONS OF THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES .....	39
NEW DENUNCIATIONS AND DEFENCES -- FRAY NICOLçS DE JESÒS MARêA -- THE CARMELITE SCHOOL AND THE INQUISITION.....	42
FURTHER HISTORY OF THE EDITIONS -- P. ANDRfS DE LA ENCARNACÎN -- EDITIONS OF THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES.....	44
ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL .....	48
INTRODUCTION .....	48
ARGUMENT .....	54
BOOK THE FIRST .....	59
CHAPTER I .....	59
CHAPTER II .....	60
CHAPTER III .....	61
CHAPTER IV .....	63
CHAPTER V.....	66
CHAPTER VI.....	69
CHAPTER VII.....	72
CHAPTER VIII.....	73
CHAPTER IX.....	76
CHAPTER X.....	79
CHAPTER XI.....	80
CHAPTER XII.....	83
CHAPTER XIII.....	85

CHAPTER XIV .....	87
CHAPTER XV .....	88
<b>BOOK THE SECOND .....</b>	<b>90</b>
CHAPTER I .....	90
CHAPTER II .....	91
CHAPTER III .....	92
CHAPTER IV .....	94
CHAPTER V .....	97
CHAPTER VI .....	101
CHAPTER VII .....	103
CHAPTER VIII .....	107
CHAPTER IX .....	109
CHAPTER X .....	111
CHAPTER XI .....	112
CHAPTER XII .....	116
CHAPTER XIII .....	119
CHAPTER XIV .....	121
CHAPTER XV .....	127
CHAPTER XVI .....	129
CHAPTER XVII .....	133
CHAPTER XVIII .....	137
CHAPTER XIX .....	140
CHAPTER XX .....	146
CHAPTER XXI .....	148
CHAPTER XXII .....	154
CHAPTER XXIII .....	161
CHAPTER XXIV .....	163
CHAPTER XXV .....	166
CHAPTER XXVI .....	167
CHAPTER XXVII .....	173
CHAPTER XXVIII .....	175
CHAPTER XXIX .....	176
CHAPTER XXX .....	180
CHAPTER XXXI .....	182
CHAPTER XXXII .....	184
<b>BOOK THE THIRD .....</b>	<b>187</b>
CHAPTER I .....	187
CHAPTER II .....	187
CHAPTER III .....	192
CHAPTER IV .....	194
CHAPTER V .....	195
CHAPTER VI .....	195
CHAPTER VII .....	197
CHAPTER VIII .....	197
CHAPTER IX .....	198
CHAPTER X .....	200

CHAPTER XI.....	200
CHAPTER XII.....	201
CHAPTER XIII.....	202
CHAPTER XIV .....	206
CHAPTER XV .....	206
CHAPTER XVI .....	208
CHAPTER XVII .....	209
CHAPTER XVIII .....	210
CHAPTER XIX .....	212
CHAPTER XX .....	216
CHAPTER XXI .....	218
CHAPTER XXII .....	219
CHAPTER XXIII .....	222
CHAPTER XXIV .....	223
CHAPTER XXV .....	225
CHAPTER XXVI .....	226
CHAPTER XXVII .....	228
CHAPTER XXVIII .....	230
CHAPTER XXIX .....	232
CHAPTER XXX .....	234
CHAPTER XXXI .....	235
CHAPTER XXXII .....	238
CHAPTER XXXIII .....	239
CHAPTER XXXIV .....	240
CHAPTER XXXV .....	240
CHAPTER XXXVI .....	243
CHAPTER XXXVII .....	244
CHAPTER XXXVIII .....	245
CHAPTER XXXIX .....	247
CHAPTER XL.....	248
CHAPTER XLI.....	249
CHAPTER XLII.....	250
CHAPTER XLIII.....	251
CHAPTER XLIV .....	252
CHAPTER XLV .....	254

## PREFACE TO THE ELECTRONIC EDITION

This electronic edition (v 0.9) has been scanned from an uncopyrighted 1962 Image Books second edition of the *Ascent* and is therefore in the public domain. The entire text and some of the footnotes have been reproduced. Nearly 1000 footnotes (and parts of footnotes) describing variations among manuscripts have been omitted. Page number references in the footnotes have been changed to chapter and section where possible. This edition has been proofread once, but additional errors may remain.

Harry Plantinga  
University of Pittsburgh  
planting@cs.pitt.edu  
July 1, 1994.

FOR at least twenty years, a new translation of the works of St. John of the Cross has been an urgent necessity. The translations of the individual prose works now in general use go back in their original form to the eighteen-sixties, and, though the later editions of some of them have been submitted to a certain degree of revision, nothing but a complete retranslation of the works from their original Spanish could be satisfactory. For this there are two reasons.

First, the existing translations were never very exact renderings of the original Spanish text even in the form which held the field when they were first published. Their great merit was extreme readableness: many a disciple of the Spanish mystics, who is unacquainted with the language in which they wrote, owes to these translations the comparative ease with which he has mastered the main lines of St. John of the Cross's teaching. Thus for the general reader they were of great utility; for the student, on the other hand, they have never been entirely adequate. They paraphrase difficult expressions, omit or add to parts of individual sentences in order (as it seems) to facilitate comprehension of the general drift of the passages in which these occur, and frequently retranslate from the Vulgate the Saint's Spanish quotations from Holy Scripture instead of turning into English the quotations themselves, using the text actually before them.

A second and more important reason for a new translation, however, is the discovery of fresh manuscripts and the consequent improvements which have been made in the Spanish text of the works of St. John of the Cross, during the present century. Seventy years ago, the text chiefly used was that of the collection known as the *Biblioteca de Autores Espa-oles* (1853), which itself was based, as we shall later see, upon an edition going back as far as 1703, published before modern methods of editing were so much as imagined. Both the text of the B.A.E. edition and the unimportant commentary which accompanied it were highly unsatisfactory, yet until the beginning of the present century nothing appreciably better was attempted.

In the last twenty years, however, we have had two new editions, each based upon a close study of the extant manuscripts and each representing a great advance upon the editions preceding it. The three-volume Toledo edition of P. Gerardo de San Juan de la Cruz, C.D. (1912-14), was the first attempt made to produce an accurate text by modern critical methods. Its execution was perhaps less laudable than its conception, and faults were pointed out in it from the time of its appearance, but it served as a new starting-point for Spanish scholars and stimulated them to a new interest in St. John of the Cross's writings. Then, seventeen years later, came the magnificent five-volume edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D. (Burgos, 1929-31), which forms the basis of this present translation. So superior is it, even on the most casual examination, to all its predecessors that to eulogize it in detail is superfluous. It is founded upon a larger number of texts than has previously been known and it collates them with greater skill than that of any earlier editor. It can hardly fail to be the standard edition of the works of St. John of the Cross for generations.

Thanks to the labours of these Carmelite scholars and of others whose findings they have incorporated in their editions, Spanish students can now approach the work of the great Doctor with the reasonable belief that they are reading, as nearly as may be, what he actually wrote. English-reading students, however, who are unable to master sixteenth-century Spanish, have hitherto had no grounds for such a belief. They cannot tell whether, in any particular passage, they are face to face with the Saint's own



words, with a translator's free paraphrase of them or with a gloss made by some later copyist or early editor in the supposed interests of orthodoxy. Indeed, they cannot be sure that some whole paragraph is not one of the numerous interpolations which has its rise in an early printed edition -- i.e., the timorous qualifications of statements which have seemed to the interpolator over-bold. Even some of the most distinguished writers in English on St. John of the Cross have been misled in this way and it has been impossible for any but those who read Spanish with ease to make a systematic and reliable study of such an important question as the alleged dependence of Spanish quietists upon the Saint, while his teaching on the mystical life has quite unwittingly been distorted by persons who would least wish to misrepresent it in any particular.

It was when writing the chapter on St. John of the Cross in the first volume of my *Studies of the Spanish Mystics* (in which, as it was published in 1927, I had not the advantage of using P. Silverio's edition) that I first realized the extent of the harm caused by the lack of an accurate and modern translation. Making my own versions of all the passages quoted, I had sometimes occasion to compare them with those of other translators, which at their worst were almost unrecognizable as versions of the same originals. Then and there I resolved that, when time allowed, I would make a fresh translation of the works of a saint to whom I have long had great devotion -- to whom, indeed, I owe more than to any other writer outside the Scriptures. Just at that time I happened to visit the Discalced Carmelites at Burgos, where I first met P. Silverio, and found, to my gratification, that his edition of St. John of the Cross was much nearer publication than I had imagined. Arrangements for sole permission to translate the new edition were quickly made and work on the early volumes was begun even before the last volume was published.

## II

These preliminary notes will explain why my chief preoccupation throughout the performance of this task has been to present as accurate and reliable a version of St. John of the Cross's works as it is possible to obtain. To keep the translation, line by line, *au pied de la lettre*, is, of course, impracticable: and such constantly occurring Spanish habits as the use of abstract nouns in the plural and the verbal construction '*ir* + present participle' introduce shades of meaning which cannot always be reproduced. Yet wherever, for stylistic or other reasons, I have departed from the Spanish in any way that could conceivably cause a misunderstanding, I have scrupulously indicated this in a footnote. Further, I have translated, not only the text, but the variant readings as given by P. Silverio,<sup>1</sup> except where they are due merely to slips of the copyist's pen or where they differ so slightly from the readings of the text that it is impossible to render the differences in English. I beg students not to think that some of the smaller changes noted are of no importance; closer examination will often show that, however slight they may seem, they are, in relation to their context, or to some particular aspect of the Saint's teaching, of real interest; in other places they help to give the reader an idea, which may be useful to him in some crucial passage, of the general characteristics of the manuscript or edition in question. The editor's notes on the manuscripts and early editions which he has collated will also be found, for the same reason, to be summarized in the introduction to each work; in consulting the variants, the English-

---

<sup>1</sup>The footnotes are P. Silverio's except where they are enclosed in square brackets.

reading student has the maximum aid to a judgment of the reliability of his authorities.

Concentration upon the aim of obtaining the most precise possible rendering of the text has led me to sacrifice stylistic elegance to exactness where the two have been in conflict; it has sometimes been difficult to bring oneself to reproduce the Saint's often ungainly, though often forceful, repetitions of words or his long, cumbrous parentheses, but the temptation to take refuge in graceful paraphrases has been steadily resisted. In the same interest, and also in that of space, I have made certain omissions from, and abbreviations of, other parts of the edition than the text. Two of P. Silverio's five volumes are entirely filled with commentaries and documents. I have selected from the documents those of outstanding interest to readers with no detailed knowledge of Spanish religious history and have been content to summarize the editor's introductions to the individual works, as well as his longer footnotes to the text, and to omit such parts as would interest only specialists, who are able, or at least should be obliged, to study them in the original Spanish.

The decision to summarize in these places has been made the less reluctantly because of the frequent unsuitability of P. Silverio's style to English readers. Like that of many Spaniards, it is so discursive, and at times so baroque in its wealth of epithet and its profusion of imagery, that a literal translation, for many pages together, would seldom have been acceptable. The same criticism would have been applicable to any literal translation of P. Silverio's biography of St. John of the Cross which stands at the head of his edition (Vol. I, pp. 7-130). There was a further reason for omitting these biographical chapters. The long and fully documented biography by the French Carmelite, P. Bruno de JŽsus-Marie, C.D., written from the same standpoint as P. Silverio's, has recently been translated into English, and any attempt to rival this in so short a space would be foredoomed to failure. I have thought, however, that a brief outline of the principal events in St. John of the Cross's life would be a useful preliminary to this edition; this has therefore been substituted for the biographical sketch referred to.

In language, I have tried to reproduce the atmosphere of a sixteenth-century text as far as is consistent with clarity. Though following the paragraph divisions of my original, I have not scrupled, where this has seemed to facilitate understanding, to divide into shorter sentences the long and sometimes straggling periods in which the Saint so frequently indulged. Some attempt has been made to show the contrast between the highly adorned, poetical language of much of the commentary on the 'Spiritual Canticle' and the more closely shorn and eminently practical, though always somewhat discursive style of the *Ascent* and *Dark Night*. That the *Living Flame* occupies an intermediate position in this respect should also be clear from the style of the translation.

Quotations, whether from the Scriptures or from other sources, have been left strictly as St. John of the Cross made them. Where he quotes in Latin, the Latin has been reproduced; only his quotations in Spanish have been turned into English. The footnote references are to the Vulgate, of which the Douai Version is a direct translation; if the Authorized Version differs, as in the Psalms, the variation has been shown in square brackets for the convenience of those who use it.

A word may not be out of place regarding the translations of the poems as they appear in the prose commentaries. Obviously, it would have been impossible to use the comparatively free verse renderings which appear in Volume II of this translation, since the commentaries discuss each line and often each word of the poems. A literal version

of the poems in their original verse-lines, however, struck me as being inartistic, if not repellent, and as inviting continual comparison with the more polished verse renderings which, in spirit, come far nearer to the poet's aim. My first intention was to translate the poems, for the purpose of the commentaries, into prose. But later I hit upon the long and metrically unfettered verse-line, suggestive of Biblical poetry in its English dress, which I have employed throughout. I believe that, although the renderings often suffer artistically from their necessary literalness, they are from the artistic standpoint at least tolerable.

### III

The debts I have to acknowledge, though few, are very large ones. My gratitude to P. Silverio de Santa Teresa for telling me so much about his edition before its publication, granting my publishers the sole translation rights and discussing with me a number of crucial passages cannot be disjoined from the many kindnesses I have received during my work on the Spanish mystics, which is still proceeding, from himself and from his fellow-Carmelites in the province of Castile. In dedicating this translation to them, I think particularly of P. Silverio in Burgos, of P. Florencio del Ni-o Jesoes in Madrid, and of P. Cris—gono de Jesoes Sacramentado, together with the Fathers of the 'Convento de la Santa' in çvila.

The long and weary process of revising the manuscript and proofs of this translation has been greatly lightened by the co-operation and companionship of P. Edmund Gurdon, Prior of the Cartuja de Miraflores, near Burgos, with whom I have freely discussed all kinds of difficulties, both of substance and style, and who has been good enough to read part of my proofs. From the quiet library of his monastery, as well as from his gracious companionship, I have drawn not only knowledge, but strength, patience and perseverance. And when at length, after each of my visits, we have had to part, we have continued our labours by correspondence, shaking hands, as it were, 'over a vast' and embracing 'from the ends of oppos d winds.'

Finally, I owe a real debt to my publishers for allowing me to do this work without imposing any such limitations of time as often accompany literary undertakings. This and other considerations which I have received from them have made that part of the work which has been done outside the study unusually pleasant and I am correspondingly grateful.

E. ALLISON PEERS.

University of Liverpool.  
Feast of St. John of the Cross,  
November 24, 1933.

NOTE. -- Wherever a commentary by St. John of the Cross is referred to, its title is given in italics (e.g. *Spiritual Canticle*); where the corresponding poem is meant, it is placed between quotation marks (e.g. 'Spiritual Canticle'). The abbreviation 'e.p.' stands for *editio princeps* throughout.

## TRANSLATOR'S PREFACE TO THE SECOND EDITION

DURING the sixteen years which have elapsed since the publication of the first edition, several reprints have been issued, and the demand is now such as to justify a complete resetting. I have taken advantage of this opportunity to revise the text throughout, and hope that in some of the more difficult passages I may have come nearer than before to the Saint's mind. Recent researches have necessitated a considerable amplification of introductions and footnotes and greatly increased the length of the bibliography.

The only modification which has been made consistently throughout the three volumes relates to St. John of the Cross's quotations from Scripture. In translating these I still follow him exactly, even where he himself is inexact, but I have used the Douia Version (instead of the Authorized, as in the first edition) as a basis for all Scriptural quotations, as well as in the footnote references and the Scriptural index in Vol. III.

Far more is now known of the life and times of St. John of the Cross than when this translation of the *Complete Works* was first published, thanks principally to the *Historia del Carmen Descalzo* of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D., now General of his Order, and to the admirably documented Life of the Saint written by P. Cris—gono de Jesus Sacramentado, C.D., and published (in *Vida y Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*) in the year after his untimely death. This increased knowledge is reflected in many additional notes, and also in the 'Outline of the Life of St. John of the Cross' (Vol. I, pp. xxv-xxviii), which, for this edition, has been entirely recast. References are given to my *Handbook to the Life and Times of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross*, which provides much background too full to be reproduced in footnotes and too complicated to be compressed. The *Handbook* also contains numerous references to contemporary events, omitted from the 'Outline' as being too remote from the main theme to justify inclusion in a summary necessarily so condensed.

My thanks for help in revision are due to kindly correspondents, too numerous to name, from many parts of the world, who have made suggestions for the improvement of the first edition; to the Rev. Professor David Knowles, of Cambridge University, for whose continuous practical interest in this translation I cannot be too grateful; to Miss I.L. McClelland, of Glasgow University, who has read a large part of this edition in proof; to Dom Philippe Chevallier, for material which I have been able to incorporate in it; to P. JosŽ Antonio de Sobrino, S.J., for allowing me to quote freely from his recently published *Estudios*; and, most of all, to M.R.P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D., and the Fathers of the International Carmelite College at Rome, whose learning and experience, are, I hope, faintly reflected in this new edition.

E.A.P.

June 30, 1941.

## PRINCIPAL ABBREVIATIONS

A.V.--Authorized Version of the Bible (1611).

D.V.--Douai Version of the Bible (1609).

*C.W.S.T.J.*--*The Complete Works of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers from the critical edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D. London, Sheed and Ward, 1946. 3 vols.

H.-E. Allison Peers: *Handbook to the Life and Times of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross*. London, Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1953.

LL.--*The Letters of Saint Teresa of Jesus*, translated and edited by E. Allison Peers from the critical edition of P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D. London, Burns Oates and Washburne, 1951. 2 vols.

N.L.M.--National Library of Spain (Biblioteca Nacional), Madrid.

*Obras (P. Silv.)*--*Obras de San Juan de la Cruz*, Doctor de la Iglesia, editadas y anotadas por el P. Silverio de Santa Teresa, C.D. Burgos, 1929-31. 5 vols.

S.S.M.--E. Allison Peers: *Studies of the Spanish Mystics*. Vol. I, London, Sheldon Press, 1927; 2nd ed., London, S.P.C.K., 1951. Vol. II, London, Sheldon Press, 1930.

Sobrino.-JosŽ Antonio de Sobrino, S.J.: *Estudios sobre San Juan de la Cruz y nuevos textos de su obra*. Madrid, 1950.

## AN OUTLINE OF THE LIFE OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS<sup>2</sup>

1542. Birth of Juan de Yepes at Fontiveros (Hontiveros), near Çvila.

The day generally ascribed to this event is June 24 (St. John Baptist's Day). No documentary evidence for it, however, exists, the parish registers having been destroyed by a fire in 1544. The chief evidence is an inscription, dated 1689, on the font of the parish church at Fontiveros.

? c. 1543. Death of Juan's father. 'After some years' the mother removes, with her family, to ArŹvalo, and later to Medina del Campo.

? c. 1552-6. Juan goes to school at the Colegio de los Ni—os de la Doctrina, Medina.

c. 1556-7. Don Antonio Çlvarez de Toledo takes him into a Hospital to which he has retired, with the idea of his (Juan's) training for Holy Orders under his patronage.

? c. 1559-63. Juan attends the College of the Society of Jesus at Medina.

c. 1562. Leaves the Hospital and the patronage of Çlvarez de Toledo.

1563. Takes the Carmelite habit at St. Anne's, Medina del Campo, as Juan de San Mat'as (Santo Mat'a).

The day is frequently assumed (without any foundation) to have been the feast of St. Matthias (February 24), but P. Silverio postulates a day in August or September and P. Cris—gono thinks February definitely improbable.

1564. Makes his profession in the same priory -- probably in August or September and certainly not earlier than May 21 and not later than October.

1564 (November). Enters the University of Salamanca as an *artista*. Takes a three-year course in Arts (1564-7).

1565 (January 6). Matriculates at the University of Salamanca.

1567. Receives priest's orders (probably in the summer).

1567 (? September). Meets St. Teresa at Medina del Campo. Juan is thinking of transferring to the Carthusian Order. St. Teresa asks him to join her Discalced Reform and the projected first foundation for friars. He agrees to do so, provided the foundation is soon made.

1567 (November). Returns to the University of Salamanca, where he takes a year's course in theology.

1568. Spends part of the Long Vacation at Medina del Campo. On August 10, accompanies St. Teresa to Valladolid. In September, returns to Medina and later goes to Avila and Duruelo.

1568 (November 28). Takes the vows of the Reform Duruelo as St. John of the Cross, together with Antonio de Heredia (Antonio de Jesus), Prior of the Calced

---

<sup>2</sup>Cf. Translator's Preface to the First Edition, ¶ II.

- Carmelites at Medina, and JosŽ de Cristo, another Carmelite from Medina.
- 1570 (June 11). Moves, with the Duruelo community, to Mancera de Abajo.
- 1570 (October, or possibly February 1571). Stays for about a month at Pastrana, returning thence to Mancera.
- 1571 (? January 25). Visits Alba de Tormes for the inauguration of a new convent there.
- 1571 (? April). Goes to Alcalŕ de Henares as Rector of the College of the Reform and directs the Carmelite nuns.
- 1572 (shortly after April 23). Recalled to Pastrana to correct the rigours of the new novice-master, Angel de San Gabriel.
- 1572 (between May and September). Goes to ŕvila as confessor to the Convent of the Incarnation. Remains there till 1577.
- 1574 (March). Accompanies St. Teresa from ŕvila to Segovia, arriving on March 18. Returns to ŕvila about the end of the month.
- 1575-6 (Winter of: before February 1576). Kidnapped by the Calced and imprisoned at Medina del Campo. Freed by the intervention of the Papal Nuncio, Ormaneto.
- 1577 (December 2 or 3). Kidnapped by the Calced and carried off to the Calced Carmelite priory at Toledo as a prisoner.
- 1577-8. Composes in prison 17 (or perhaps 30) stanzas of the 'Spiritual Canticle' (i.e., as far as the stanza: 'Daughters of Jewry'); the poem with the refrain 'Although 'tis night'; and the stanzas beginning 'In principio erat verbum.' He may also have composed the paraphrase of the psalm *Super flumina* and the poem 'Dark Night.' (Note: All these poems, in verse form, will be found in Vol. II of this edition.)
- 1578 (August 16 or shortly afterwards). Escapes to the convent of the Carmelite nuns in Toledo, and is thence taken to his house by D. Pedro Gonzŕlez de Mendoza, Canon of Toledo.
- 1578 (October 9). Attends a meeting of the Discalced superiors at Almodŕvar. Is sent to El Calvario as Vicar, in the absence in Rome of the Prior.
- 1578 (end of October). Stays for 'a few days' at Beas de Segura, near El Calvario. Confesses the nuns at the Carmelite Convent of Beas.
- 1578 (November). Arrives at El Calvario.
- 1578-9 (November-June). Remains at El Calvario as Vicar. For a part of this time (probably from the beginning of 1579), goes weekly to the convent of Beas to hear confessions. During this period, begins his commentaries entitled *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* (cf. pp. 9-314, below) and *Spiritual Canticle* (translated in Vol. II).
- 1579 (June 14). Founds a college of the Reform at Baeza. 1579-82. Resides at Baeza as Rector of the Carmelite college. Visits the Beas convent occasionally. Writes more of the prose works begun at El Calvario and the rest of the stanzas of the 'Spiritual Canticle' except the last five, possibly with the commentaries to the stanzas.
1580. Death of his mother.

- 1581 (March 3). Attends the Alcalá Chapter of the Reform. Appointed Third Definitor and Prior of the Granada house of Los M̃rtires. Takes up the latter office only on or about the time of his election by the community in March 1582.
- 1581 (November 28). Last meeting with St. Teresa, at çvila. On the next day, sets out with two nuns for Beas (December 8-January 15) and Granada.
- 1582 (January 20). Arrives at Los M̃rtires.
- 1582-8. Mainly at Granada. Re-elected (or confirmed) as Prior of Los M̃rtires by the Chapter of Almod—var, 1583. Resides at Los M̃rtires more or less continuously till 1584 and intermittently afterwards. Visits the Beas convent occasionally. Writes the last five stanzas of the 'Spiritual Canticle' during one of these visits. At Los M̃rtires, finishes the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and composes his remaining prose treatises. Writes *Living Flame of Love* about 1585, in fifteen days, at the request of Do—a Ana de Pe—alosa.
- 1585 (May). Lisbon Chapter appoints him Second Definitor and (till 1587) Vicar-Provincial of Andalusia. Makes the following foundations: M̃laga, February 17, 1585; C—rdoba, May 18, 1586; La Manchuela (de JaŽn), October 12, 1586; Caravaca, December 18, 1586; Bujalance, June 24, 1587.
- 1587 (April). Chapter of Valladolid re-appoints him Prior of Los M̃rtires. He ceases to be Definitor and Vicar-Provincial.
- 1588 (June 19). Attends the first Chapter-General of the Reform in Madrid. Is elected First Definitor and a *consiliario*.
- 1588 (August 10). Becomes Prior of Segovia, the central house of the Reform and the headquarters of the Consulta. Acts as deputy for the Vicar-General, P. Doria, during the latter's absences.
- 1590 (June 10). Re-elected First Definitor and a *consiliario* at the Chapter-General Extraordinary, Madrid.
- 1591 (June 1). The Madrid Chapter-General deprives him of his offices and resolves to send him to Mexico. (This latter decision was later revoked.)
- 1591 (August 10). Arrives at La Pe—uela.
- 1591 (September 12). Attacked by fever. (September Leaves La Pe—uela for òbeda. (December 14) Dies at òbeda.
- January 25, 1675. Beatified by Clement X.
- December 26, 1726. Canonized by Benedict XIII.
- August 24, 1926. Declared Doctor of the Church Universal by Pius XI.



# GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE WORKS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

## I

### DATES AND METHODS OF COMPOSITION. GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

WITH regard to the times and places at which the works of St. John of the Cross were written, and also with regard to the number of these works, there have existed, from a very early date, considerable differences of opinion. Of internal evidence from the Saint's own writings there is practically none, and such external testimony as can be found in contemporary documents needs very careful examination.

There was no period in the life of St. John of the Cross in which he devoted himself entirely to writing. He does not, in fact, appear to have felt any inclination to do so: his books were written in response to the insistent and repeated demands of his spiritual children. He was very much addicted, on the other hand, to the composition of apothegms or maxims for the use of his penitents and this custom he probably began as early as the days in which he was confessor to the Convent of the Incarnation at çvila, though his biographers have no record of any maxims but those written at Beas. One of his best beloved daughters however, Ana Mar'a de Jesœs, of the Convent of the Incarnation, declared in her deposition, during the process of the Saint's canonization, that he was accustomed to 'comfort those with whom he had to do, both by his words and by his letters, of which this witness received a number, and also by certain papers concerning holy things which this witness would greatly value if she still had them.' Considering, the number of nuns to whom the Saint was director at çvila, it is to be presumed that M. Ana Mar'a was not the only person whom he favoured. We may safely conclude, indeed, that there were many others who shared the same privileges, and that, had we all these 'papers,' they would comprise a large volume, instead of the few pages reproduced elsewhere in this translation.

There is a well-known story, preserved in the documents of the canonization process, of how, on a December night of 1577, St. John, of the Cross was kidnapped by the Calced Carmelites of çvila and carried off from the Incarnation to their priory.<sup>3</sup> Realizing that he had left behind him some important papers, he contrived, on the next morning, to escape, and returned to the Incarnation to destroy them while there was time to do so. He was missed almost immediately and he had hardly gained his cell when his pursuers were on his heels. In the few moments that remained to him he had time to tear up these papers and swallow some of the most compromising. As the original assault had not been unexpected, though the time of it was uncertain, they would not have been very numerous. It is generally supposed that they concerned the business of the infant Reform, of which the survival was at that time in grave doubt. But it seems at least equally likely that some of them might have been these spiritual maxims, or some more extensive instructions which might be misinterpreted by any who

---

<sup>3</sup>[H., III, ii.]

found them. It is remarkable, at any rate, that we have none of the Saint's writings belonging to this period whatever.

All his biographers tell us that he wrote some of the stanzas of the 'Spiritual Canticle,' together with a few other poems, while he was imprisoned at Toledo. 'When he left the prison,' says M. Magdalena del Esp'ritu Santo, 'he took with him a little book in which he had written, while there, some verses based upon the Gospel *In principio erat Verbum*, together with some couplets which begin: "How well I know the fount that freely flows, Although 'tis night," and the stanzas or *liras* that begin "Whither has vanish d?" as far as the stanzas beginning "Daughters of Jewry." The remainder of them the Saint composed later when he was Rector of the College at Baeza. Some of the expositions were written at Beas, as answers to questions put to him by the nuns; others at Granada. This little book, in which the Saint wrote while in prison, he left in the Convent of Beas and on various occasions I was commanded to copy it. Then someone took it from my cell -- who, I never knew. The freshness of the words in this book, together with their beauty and subtlety, caused me great wonder, and one day I asked the Saint if God gave him those words which were so comprehensive and so lovely. And he answered: "Daughter, sometimes God gave them to me and at other times I sought them."<sup>4</sup>

M. Isabel de Jesoes Mar'a, who was a novice at Toledo when the Saint escaped from his imprisonment there, wrote thus from Cuerva on November 2, 1614. 'I remember, too, that, at the time we had him hidden in the church, he recited to us some lines which he had composed and kept in his mind, and that one of the nuns wrote them down as he repeated them. There were three poems -- all of them upon the Most Holy Trinity, and so sublime and devout that they seem to enkindle the reader. In this house at Cuerva we have some which begin:

"Far away in the beginning,  
Dwelt the Word in God Most High."<sup>5</sup>

The frequent references to keeping his verses in his head and the popular exaggeration of the hardships (great though these were) which the Saint had to endure in Toledo have led some writers to affirm that he did not in fact write these poems in prison but committed them to memory and transferred them to paper at some later date. The evidence of M. Magdalena, however, would appear to be decisive. We know, too, that the second of St. John of the Cross's gaolers, Fray Juan de Santa Mar'a, was a kindly man who did all he could to lighten his captive's sufferings; and his superiors would probably not have forbidden him writing materials provided he wrote no letters.<sup>6</sup>

It seems, then, that the Saint wrote in Toledo the first seventeen (or perhaps

---

<sup>4</sup>M. Magdalena is a very reliable witness, for she was not only a most discreet and able woman, but was also one of those who were very near to the saint and gained most from his spiritual direction. The quotation is from MS. 12,944.

<sup>5</sup>MS. 12,738, fol. 835. Ft. Jer—nimo de S. JosŽ, too, says that the nuns of Toledo also copied certain poems from the Saint's dictation. M. Ana de S. Alberto heard him say of his imprisonment: 'God sought to try me, but His mercy forsook me not. I made some stanzas there which begin: "Whither hast vanish d, Beloved"; and also those other verses, beginning "Far above the many rivers That in Babylon abound." All these verses I sent to Fray JosŽ de Jesoes Mar'a, who told me that he was interested in them and was keeping them in his memory in order to write them out.'

<sup>6</sup>[H., III, ii.]

thirty) stanzas of the 'Spiritual Canticle,' the nine parts of the poem 'Far away in the beginning . . .,' the paraphrase of the psalm *Super flumina Babylonis* and the poem 'How well I know the fount . . .' This was really a considerable output of work, for, except perhaps when his gaoler allowed him to go into another room, he had no light but that of a small oil-lamp or occasionally the infiltration of daylight that penetrated a small interior window.

Apart from the statement of M. Magdalena already quoted, little more is known of what the Saint wrote in El Calvario than of what he wrote in Toledo. From an amplification made by herself of the sentences to which we have referred it appears that almost the whole of what she had copied was taken from her; as the short extracts transcribed by her are very similar to passages from the Saint's writings we may perhaps conclude that much of the other material was also incorporated in them. In that case he may well have completed a fair proportion of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* before leaving Beas.

It was in El Calvario, too, and for the nuns of Beas, that the Saint drew the plan called the 'Mount of Perfection' (referred to by M. Magdalena<sup>7</sup> and in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and reproduced as the frontispiece to this volume) of which copies were afterwards multiplied and distributed among Discalced houses. Its author wished it to figure at the head of all his treatises, for it is a graphical representation of the entire mystic way, from the starting-point of the beginner to the very summit of perfection. His first sketch, which still survives, is a rudimentary and imperfect one; before long, however, as M. Magdalena tells us, he evolved another that was fuller and more comprehensive.

---

<sup>7</sup>MS. 12,944. 'He also occasionally wrote spiritual things that were of great benefit. There, too, he composed the *Mount* and drew a copy with his own hand for each of our breviaries; later, he added to these copies and made some changes.'



planted with trees. Three paths, as in the first sketch, lead from the base of the mount, but they are traced more artistically and have a more detailed ascetic and mystical application. Those on either side, which denote the roads of imperfection, are broad and somewhat tortuous and come to an end before the higher stages of the mount are reached. The centre road, that of perfection, is at first very narrow but gradually broadens and leads right up to the summit of the mountain, which only the perfect attain and where they enjoy the *iuge convivium* -- the heavenly feast. The different zones of religious perfection, from which spring various virtues, are portrayed with much greater detail than in the first plan. As we have reproduced the second plan in this volume, it need not be described more fully.

We know that St. John of the Cross used the 'Mount' very, frequently for all kinds of religious instruction. 'By means of this drawing,' testified one of his disciples, 'he used to teach us that, in order to attain to perfection, we must not desire the good things of earth, nor those of Heaven; but that we must desire naught save to seek and strive after the glory and honour of God our Lord in all things . . . and this "Mount of Perfection" the said holy father himself expounded to this Witness when he was his superior in the said priory of Granada.'<sup>9</sup>

It seems not improbable that the Saint continued writing chapters of the *Ascent* and the *Spiritual Canticle* while he was Rector at Baeza,<sup>10</sup> whether in the College itself, or in El Castellar, where he was accustomed often to go into retreat. It was certainly here that he wrote the remaining stanzas of the *Canticle* (as M. Magdalena explicitly tells us in words already quoted), except the last five, which he composed rather later, at Granada. One likes to think that these loveliest of his verses were penned by the banks of the Guadalimar, in the woods of the Granja de Santa Ann, where he was in the habit of passing long hours in communion with God. At all events the stanzas seem more in harmony with such an atmosphere than with that of the College.

With regard to the last five stanzas, we have definite evidence from a Beas nun, M. Francisca de la Madre de Dios, who testifies in the Beatification process (April 2, 1618) as follows:

And so, when the said holy friar John of the Cross was in this convent one Lent (for his great love for it brought him here from the said city of Granada, where he was prior, to confess the nuns and preach to them) he was preaching to them one day in the parlour, and this witness observed that on two separate occasions he was rapt and lifted up from the ground; and when he came to himself he dissembled and said: 'You saw how sleep overcame me!' And one day he asked this witness in what her prayer consisted, and she replied: 'In considering the beauty of God and in rejoicing that He has such beauty.' And the Saint was so pleased with this that for some days he said the most sublime things concerning the beauty of God, at which all marvelled. And thus, under the influence of this love, he composed five stanzas, beginning 'Beloved, let us sing, And in thy beauty see ourselves portray'd.' And in all this he showed that there was in his breast a great love of God.

From a letter which this nun wrote from Beas in 1629 to P. Jer—nimo de San

---

<sup>9</sup>Fray Martin de San JosŽ in MS. 12,738, fol. 125.

<sup>10</sup>[H., IV, i.]

JosŽ, we gather that the stanzas were actually written at Granada and brought to Beas, where

. . . with every word that we spoke to him we seemed to be opening a door to the fruition of the great treasures and riches which God had stored up in his soul.

If there is a discrepancy here, however, it is of small importance; there is no doubt as to the approximate date of the composition of these stanzas and of their close connection with Beas.

The most fruitful literary years for St. John of the Cross were those which he spent at Granada. Here he completed the *Ascent* and wrote all his remaining treatises. Both M. Magdalena and the Saint's closest disciple, P. Juan Evangelista, bear witness to this. The latter writes from Granada to P. Jer—nimo de San JosŽ, the historian of the Reform:

With regard to having seen our venerable father write the books, I saw him write them all; for, as I have said, I was ever at his side. The *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night* he wrote here at Granada, little by little, continuing them only with many breaks. The *Living Flame of Love* he also wrote in this house, when he was Vicar-Provincial, at the request of Do—a Ana de Pe—alosa, and he wrote it in fifteen days when he was very busy here with an abundance of occupations. The first thing that he wrote was *Whither hast vanish d?* and that too he wrote here; the stanzas he had written in the prison at Toledo.<sup>11</sup>

In another letter (February 18, 1630), he wrote to the same correspondent:

With regard to our holy father's having written his books in this home, I will say what is undoubtedly true -- namely, that he wrote here the commentary on the stanzas *Whither hast vanish d?* and the *Living Flame of Love*, for he began and ended them in my time. The *Ascent of Mount Carmel* I found had been begun when I came here to take the habit, which was a year and a half after the foundation of this house; he may have brought it from yonder already begun. But the *Dark Night* he certainly wrote here, for I saw him writing a part of it, and this is certain, because I saw it.<sup>12</sup>

These and other testimonies might with advantage be fuller and more concrete, but at least they place beyond doubt the facts that we have already set down. Summarizing our total findings, we may assert that part of the 'Spiritual Cantic,' with perhaps the 'Dark Night,' and the other poems enumerated, were written in the Toledo prison; that at the request of some nuns he wrote at El Calvario (1578-79) a few chapters of the *Ascent* and commentaries on some of the stanzas of the 'Cantic'; that he composed further stanzas at Baeza (1579-81), perhaps with their respective commentaries; and that, finally, he completed the *Cantic* and the *Ascent* at Granada and wrote the whole of the *Dark Night* and of the *Living Flame* -- the latter in a fortnight. All these last works he wrote before the end of 1585, the first year in which he was

---

<sup>11</sup>MS. 12,738, fol. 1,431. The letter is undated as to the year.

<sup>12</sup>MS. 12,738, fol. 1,435.

Vicar-Provincial.

Other writings, most of them brief, are attributed to St. John of the Cross; they will be discussed in the third volume of this edition, in which we shall publish the minor works which we accept as genuine. The authorship of his four major prose works -- the *Ascent*, *Dark Night*, *Spiritual Canticle* and *Living Flame* -- no one has ever attempted to question, even though the lack of extant autographs and the large number of copies have made it difficult to establish correct texts. To this question we shall return later.

The characteristics of the writings of St. John of the Cross are so striking that it would be difficult to confuse them with those of any other writer. His literary personality stands out clearly from that of his Spanish contemporaries who wrote on similar subjects. Both his style and his methods of exposition bear the marks of a strong individuality.

If some of these derive from his native genius and temperament, others are undoubtedly reflections of his education and experience. The Aristotelian-Thomistic philosophy, then at the height of its splendour, which he learned so thoroughly in the classrooms of Salamanca University, characterizes the whole of his writings, giving them a granite-like solidity even when their theme is such as to defy human speculation. Though the precise extent of his debt to this Salamancan training in philosophy has not yet been definitely assessed, the fact of its influence is evident to every reader. It gives massiveness, harmony and unity to both the ascetic and the mystical work of St. John of the Cross -- that is to say, to all his scientific writing.

Deeply, however, as St. John of the Cross drew from the Schoolmen, he was also profoundly indebted to many other writers. He was distinctly eclectic in his reading and quotes freely (though less than some of his Spanish contemporaries) from the Fathers and from the mediaeval mystics, especially from St. Thomas, St. Bonaventura, Hugh of St. Victor and the pseudo-Areopagite. All that he quotes, however, he makes his own, with the result that his chapters are never a mass of citations loosely strung together, as are those of many other Spanish mystics of his time.

When we study his treatises -- principally that great composite work known as the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and the *Dark Night* -- we have the impression of a master-mind that has scaled the heights of mystical science and from their summit looks down upon and dominates the plain below and the paths leading upward. We may well wonder what a vast contribution to the subject he would have made had he been able to expound all the eight stanzas of his poem since he covered so much ground in expounding no more than two. Observe with what assurance and what mastery of subject and method he defines his themes and divides his arguments, even when treating the most abstruse and controversial questions. The most obscure phenomena he appears to illumine, as it were, with one lightning flash of understanding, as though the explanation of them were perfectly natural and easy. His solutions of difficult problems are not timid, questioning and loaded with exceptions, but clear, definite and virile like the man who proposes them. No scientific field, perhaps, has so many zones which are apt to become vague and obscure as has that of mystical theology; and there are those among the Saint's predecessors who seem to have made their permanent abode in them. They give the impression of attempting to cloak vagueness in verbosity, in order to avoid being forced into giving solutions of problems which they find insoluble. Not so St. John of the Cross. A scientific dictator, if such a person were conceivable, could hardly express himself with greater clarity. His phrases have a decisive, almost a

chiselled quality; where he errs on the side of redundancy, it is not with the intention of cloaking uncertainty, but in order that he may drive home with double force the truths which he desires to impress.

No less admirable are, on the one hand, his synthetic skill and the logic of his arguments, and, on the other, his subtle and discriminating analyses, which weigh the finest shades of thought and dissect each subject with all the accuracy of science. To his analytical genius we owe those finely balanced statements, orthodox yet bold and fearless, which have caused clumsier intellects to misunderstand him. It is not remarkable that this should have occurred. The ease with which the unskilled can misinterpret genius is shown in the history of many a heresy.

How much of all this St. John of the Cross owed to his studies of scholastic philosophy in the University of Salamanca, it is difficult to say. If we examine the history of that University and read of its severe discipline we shall be in no danger of underestimating the effect which it must have produced upon so agile and alert an intellect. Further, we note the constant parallelisms and the comparatively infrequent (though occasionally important) divergences between the doctrines of St. John of the Cross and St. Thomas, to say nothing of the close agreement between the views of St. John of the Cross and those of the Schoolmen on such subjects as the passions and appetites, the nature of the soul, the relations between soul and body. Yet we must not forget the student tag: *Quod natura non dat, Salamitica non praestat*. Nothing but natural genius could impart the vigour and the clarity which enhance all St. John of the Cross's arguments and nothing but his own deep and varied experience could have made him what he may well be termed -- the greatest psychologist in the history of mysticism.

Eminent, too, was St. John of the Cross in sacred theology. The close natural connection that exists between dogmatic and mystical theology and their continual interdependence in practice make it impossible for a Christian teacher to excel in the latter alone. Indeed, more than one of the heresies that have had their beginnings in mysticism would never have developed had those who fell into them been well grounded in dogmatic theology. The one is, as it were, the lantern that lights the path of the other, as St. Teresa realized when she began to feel the continual necessity of consulting theological teachers. If St. John of the Cross is able to climb the greatest heights of mysticism and remain upon them without stumbling or dizziness it is because his feet are invariably well shod with the truths of dogmatic theology. The great mysteries -- those of the Trinity, the Creation, the Incarnation and the Redemption -- and such dogmas as those concerning grace, the gifts of the Spirit, the theological virtues, etc., were to him guide-posts for those who attempted to scale, and to lead others to scale, the symbolic mount of sanctity.

It will be remembered that the Saint spent but one year upon his theological course at the University of Salamanca, for which reason many have been surprised at the evident solidity of his attainments. But, apart from the fact that a mind so keen and retentive as that of Fray Juan de San Mat'as could absorb in a year what others would have failed to imbibe in the more usual two or three, we must of necessity assume a far longer time spent in private study. For in one year he could not have studied all the treatises of which he clearly demonstrates his knowledge -- to say nothing of many others which he must have known. His own works, apart from any external evidence, prove him to have been a theologian of distinction.

In both fields, the dogmatic and the mystical he was greatly aided by his



knowledge of Holy Scripture, which he studied continually, in the last years of his life, to the exclusion, as it would seem, of all else. Much of it he knew by heart; the simple devotional talks that he was accustomed to give were invariably studded with texts, and he made use of passages from the Bible both to justify and to illustrate his teaching. In the mystical interpretation of Holy Scripture, as every student of mysticism knows, he has had few equals even among his fellow Doctors of the Church Universal.

Testimonies to his mastery of the Scriptures can be found in abundance. P. Alonso de la Madre de Dios, *el Asturicense*, for example, who was personally acquainted with him, stated in 1603 that 'he had a great gift and facility for the exposition of the Sacred Scripture, principally of the Song of Songs, Ecclesiasticus, Ecclesiastes, the Proverbs and the Psalms of David.'<sup>13</sup> His spiritual daughter, that same Magdalena del Esp'ritus Santo to whom we have several times referred, affirms that St. John of the Cross would frequently read the Gospels to the nuns of Beas and expound the letter and the spirit to them.<sup>14</sup> Fray Juan Evangelista says in a well-known passage:

He was very fond of reading in the Scriptures, and I never once saw him read any other books than the Bible,<sup>15</sup> almost all of which he knew by heart, St. Augustine *Contra Haereses* and the *Flos Sanctorum*. When occasionally he preached (which was seldom) or gave informal addresses [*pláticas*], as he more commonly did, he never read from any book save the Bible. His conversation, whether at recreation or at other times, was continually of God, and he spoke so delightfully that, when he discoursed upon sacred things at recreation, he would make us all laugh and we used greatly to enjoy going out. On occasions when we held chapters, he would usually give devotional addresses (*pláticas divinas*) after supper, and he never failed to give an address every night.<sup>16</sup>

Fray Pablo de Santa Mar'a, who had also heard the Saint's addresses, wrote thus:

He was a man of the most enkindled spirituality and of great insight into all that concerns mystical theology and matters of prayer; I consider it impossible that he could have spoken so well about all the virtues if he had not been most proficient in the spiritual life, and I really think he knew the whole Bible by heart, so far as one could judge from the various Biblical passages which he would quote at chapters and in the refectory, without any great effort, but as one who goes where the Spirit leads him.<sup>17</sup>

Nor was this admiration for the expository ability of St. John of the Cross confined to his

---

<sup>13</sup>MS. 12,738, fol. 3. Cf. a letter of April 28, 1614, by the same friar (*ibid.*, fol. 865), which describes the Saint's knowledge of the Holy Scriptures, and skill in expounding them, as 'inspired' and 'Divine.'

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 18.

<sup>15</sup>Jer—nimo de la Cruz (*ibid.*, fol. 639) describes the Saint on his journeys as 'frequently reading the Bible' as he went along on his 'beast.'

<sup>16</sup>MS. 12,738, fol. 559. P. Alonso writes similarly in a letter to Fray Jer—nimo de San JosŽ: 'And in this matter of speaking of God and expounding passages from Scripture he made everyone marvel, for they never asked him about a passage which he could not explain in great detail, and sometimes at recreation the whole hour and much more went by in the explanation of passages about which they asked him' (fol. 1,431).

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, fol. 847.

fellow-friars, who might easily enough have been led into hero-worship. We know that he was thought highly of in this respect by the University of Alcalá de Henares, where he was consulted as an authority. A Dr. Villegas, Canon of Segovia Cathedral, has left on record his respect for him. And Fray Jerónimo de San José relates the esteem in which he was held at the University of Baeza, which in his day enjoyed a considerable reputation for Biblical studies:

There were at that time at the University of Baeza many learned and spiritually minded persons, disciples of that great father and apostle Juan de Ávila.<sup>18</sup> . . . All these doctors . . . would repair to our venerable father as to an oracle from heaven and would discuss with him both their own spiritual progress and that of souls committed to their charge, with the result that they were both edified and astonished at his skill. They would also bring him difficulties and delicate points connected with Divine letters, and on these, too, he spoke with extraordinary energy and illumination. One of these doctors, who had consulted him and listened to him on various occasions, said that, although he had read deeply in St. Augustine and St. John Chrysostom and other saints, and had found in them greater heights and depths, he had found in none of them that particular kind of spirituality in exposition which this great father applied to Scriptural passages.<sup>19</sup>

The Scriptural knowledge of St. John of the Cross was, as this passage makes clear, in no way merely academic. Both in his literal and his mystical interpretations of the Bible, he has what we may call a 'Biblical sense,' which saves him from such exaggerations as we find in other expositors, both earlier and contemporary. One would not claim, of course, that among the many hundreds of applications of Holy Scripture made by the Carmelite Doctor there are none that can be objected to in this respect; but the same can be said of St. Augustine, St. Ambrose, St. Gregory or St. Bernard, and no one would assert that, either with them or with him, such instances are other than most exceptional.

To the three sources already mentioned in which St. John of the Cross found inspiration we must add a fourth -- the works of ascetic and mystical writers. It is not yet possible to assert with any exactness how far the Saint made use of these; for, though partial studies of this question have been attempted, a complete and unbiased treatment of it has still to be undertaken. Here we can do no more than give a few indications of what remains to be done and summarize the present content of our knowledge.<sup>20</sup>

We may suppose that, during his novitiate in Medina, the Saint read a number of devotional books, one of which would almost certainly have been the *Imitation of Christ*, and others would have included works which were translated into Spanish by order of Cardinal Cisneros. The demands of a University course would not keep him from pursuing such studies at Salamanca; the friar who chose a cell from the window of

---

<sup>18</sup>[Cf. S.S.M., II, 123-48.]

<sup>19</sup>*Vida*, Bk. IV, Chap. xiv, ¶ 1.

<sup>20</sup>[On this subject cf. P. Crisógono de Jesúes Sacramentado: *San Juan de la Cruz*, Madrid, 1929, Vol. II, pp. 17-34 *et passim*.]

which he could see the Blessed Sacrament, so that he might spend hours in its company, would hardly be likely to neglect his devotional reading. But we have not a syllable of direct external evidence as to the titles of any of the books known to him.

Nor, for that matter, have we much more evidence of this kind for any other part of his life. Both his early Carmelite biographers and the numerous witnesses who gave evidence during the canonization process describe at great length his extraordinary penances, his love for places of retreat beautified by Nature, the long hours that he spent in prayer and the tongue of angels with which he spoke on things spiritual. But of his reading they say nothing except to describe his attachment to the Bible, nor have we any record of the books contained in the libraries of the religious houses that he visited. Yet if, as we gather from the process, he spent little more than three hours nightly in sleep, he must have read deeply of spiritual things by night as well as by day.

Some clues to the nature of his reading may be gained from his own writings. It is true that the clues are slender. He cites few works apart from the Bible and these are generally liturgical books, such as the Breviary. Some of his quotations from St. Augustine, St. Gregory and other of the Fathers are traceable to these sources. Nevertheless, we have not read St. John of the Cross for long before we find ourselves in the full current of mystical tradition. It is not by means of more or less literal quotations that the Saint produces this impression; he has studied his precursors so thoroughly that he absorbs the substance of their doctrine and incorporates it so intimately in his own that it becomes flesh of his flesh. Everything in his writings is fully matured: he has no juvenilia. The mediaeval mystics whom he uses are too often vague and undisciplined; they need someone to select from them and unify them, to give them clarity and order, so that their treatment of mystical theology may have the solidity and substance of scholastic theology. To have done this is one of the achievements of St. John of the Cross.

We are convinced, then, by an internal evidence which is chiefly of a kind in which no chapter and verse can be given, that St. John of the Cross read widely in mediaeval mystical theology and assimilated a great part of what he read. The influence of foreign writers upon Spanish mysticism, though it was once denied, is to-day generally recognized. It was inevitable that it should have been considerable in a country which in the sixteenth century had such a high degree of culture as Spain. Plotinus, in a diluted form, made his way into Spanish mysticism as naturally as did Seneca into Spanish asceticism. Plato and Aristotle entered it through the two greatest minds that Christianity has known -- St. Augustine and St. Thomas. The influence of the Platonic theories of love and beauty and of such basic Aristotelian theories as the origin of knowledge is to be found in most of the Spanish mystics, St. John of the Cross among them.

The pseudo-Dionysius was another writer who was considered a great authority by the Spanish mystics. The importance attributed to his works arose partly from the fact that he was supposed to have been one of the first disciples of the Apostles; many chapters from mystical works of those days all over Europe are no more than glosses of the pseudo-Areopagite. He is followed less, however, by St. John of the Cross than by many of the latter's contemporaries.

Other influences upon the Carmelite Saint were St. Gregory, St. Bernard and Hugh and Richard of St. Victor, many of whose maxims were in the mouths of the mystics in the sixteenth century. More important, probably, than any of these was the Fleming, Ruysbroeck, between whom and St. John of the Cross there were certainly

many points of contact. The Saint would have read him, not in the original, but in Surius' Latin translation of 1552, copies of which are known to have been current in Spain.<sup>21</sup> Together with Ruysbroeck may be classed Suso, Denis the Carthusian, Herp, Kempis and various other writers.

Many of the ideas and phrases which we find in St. John of the Cross, as in other writers, are, of course, traceable to the common mystical tradition rather than to any definite individual influence. The striking metaphor of the ray of light penetrating the room, for example, which occurs in the first chapter of the pseudo-Areopagite's *De Mystica Theologia*, has been used continually by mystical writers ever since his time. The figures of the wood consumed by fire, of the ladder, the mirror, the flame of love and the nights of sense and spirit had long since become naturalized in mystical literature. There are many more such examples.

The originality of St. John of the Cross is in no way impaired by his employment of this current mystical language: such an idea might once have been commonly held, but has long ceased to be put forward seriously. His originality, indeed, lies precisely in the use which he made of language that he found near to hand. It is not going too far to liken the place taken by St. John of the Cross in mystical theology to that of St. Thomas in dogmatic; St. Thomas laid hold upon the immense store of material which had accumulated in the domain of dogmatic theology and subjected it to the iron discipline of reason. That St. John of the Cross did the same for mystical theology is his great claim upon our admiration. Through St. Thomas speaks the ecclesiastical tradition of many ages on questions of religious belief; through St. John speaks an equally venerable tradition on questions of Divine love. Both writers combined sainthood with genius. Both opened broad channels to be followed of necessity by Catholic writers through the ages to come till theology shall lose itself in that vast ocean of truth and love which is God. Both created instruments adequate to the greatness of their task: St. Thomas' clear, decisive reasoning processes give us the formula appropriate to each and every need of the understanding; St. John clothes his teaching in mellower and more appealing language, as befits the exponent of the science of love. We may describe the treatises of St. John of the Cross as the true *Summa Angelica* of mystical theology.

## II

### OUTSTANDING QUALITIES AND DEFECTS OF THE SAINT'S STYLE

THE profound and original thought which St. John of the Cross bestowed upon so abstruse a subject, and upon one on which there was so little classical literature in Spanish when he wrote, led him to clothe his ideas in a language at once energetic, precise and of a high degree of individuality. His style reflects his thought, but it reflects the style of no school and of no other writer whatsoever.

This is natural enough, for thought and feeling were always uppermost in the Saint: style and language take a place entirely subordinate to them. Never did he sacrifice any idea to artistic combinations of words; never blur over any delicate shade

---

<sup>21</sup>On Flemish influences on Spanish mysticism, see P. Groult: *Les Mystiques des Pays-Bas et la littérature espagnole du seizième siècle*, Louvain, 1927 [ ], and Joaquín Sanchis Alentosa, O.F.M.: *La Escuela mística alemana y sus relaciones con nuestros místicos del Siglo de Oro*, Madrid, 1946].

of thought to enhance some rhythmic cadence of musical prose. Literary form (to use a figure which he himself might have coined) is only present at all in his works in the sense in which the industrious and deferential servant is present in the ducal apartment, for the purpose of rendering faithful service to his lord and master. This subordination of style to content in the Saint's work is one of its most eminent qualities. He is a great writer, but not a great stylist. The strength and robustness of his intellect everywhere predominate.

This to a large extent explains the negligences which we find in his style, the frequency with which it is marred by repetitions and its occasional degeneration into diffuseness. The long, unwieldy sentences, one of which will sometimes run to the length of a reasonably sized paragraph, are certainly a trial to many a reader. So intent is the Saint upon explaining, underlining and developing his points so that they shall be apprehended as perfectly as may be, that he continually recurs to what he has already said, and repeats words, phrases and even passages of considerable length without scruple. It is only fair to remind the reader that such things were far commoner in the Golden Age than they are to-day; most didactic Spanish prose of that period would be notably improved, from a modern standpoint, if its volume were cut down by about one-third.

Be that as it may, these defects in the prose of St. John of the Cross are amply compensated by the fullness of his phraseology, the wealth and profusion of his imagery, the force and the energy of his argument. He has only to be compared with the didactic writers who were his contemporaries for this to become apparent. Together with Luis de Granada, Luis de León, Juan de los Angeles and Luis de la Puente,<sup>22</sup> he created a genuinely native language, purged of Latinisms, precise and eloquent, which Spanish writers have used ever since in writing of mystical theology.

The most sublime of all the Spanish mystics, he soars aloft on the wings of Divine love to heights known to hardly any of them. Though no words can express the loftiest of the experiences which he describes, we are never left with the impression that word, phrase or image has failed him. If it does not exist, he appears to invent it, rather than pause in his description in order to search for an expression of the idea that is in his mind or be satisfied with a prolix paraphrase. True to the character of his thought, his style is always forceful and energetic, even to a fault.

We have said nothing of his poems, for indeed they call for no purely literary commentary. How full of life the greatest of them are, how rich in meaning, how unforgettable and how inimitable, the individual reader may see at a glance or may learn from his own experience. Many of their exquisite figures their author owes, directly or indirectly, to his reading and assimilation of the Bible. Some of them, however, have acquired a new life in the form which he has given them. A line here, a phrase there, has taken root in the mind of some later poet or essayist and has given rise to a new work of art, to many lovers of which the Saint who lies behind it is unknown.

It is perhaps not an exaggeration to say that the verse and prose works combined of St. John of the Cross form at once the most grandiose and the most melodious spiritual canticle to which any one man has ever given utterance. It is impossible, in the space at our disposal, to quote at any length from the Spanish critics who have paid tribute to its comprehensiveness and profundity. We must content ourselves with a short quotation characterizing the Saint's poems, taken from the

---

<sup>22</sup>[Cf. S.S.M., I (1927), 33-76, 291-405; (1951), 25-61, 235-328; II (1930), 309-43.]

greatest of these critics, Marcelino Menéndez Pelayo, who, besides referring frequently to St. John of the Cross in such of his mature works as the *Heterodoxos*, *Ideas Estéticas* and *Ciencia Española*, devoted to him a great part of the address which he delivered as a young man at his official reception into the Spanish Academy under the title of 'Mystical Poetry.'

'So sublime,' wrote Menéndez Pelayo, 'is this poetry [of St. John of the Cross] that it scarcely seems to belong to this world at all; it is hardly capable of being assessed by literary criteria. More ardent in its passion than any profane poetry, its form is as elegant and exquisite, as plastic and as highly figured as any of the finest works of the Renaissance. The spirit of God has passed through these poems every one, beautifying and sanctifying them on its way.'

### III

#### DIFFUSION OF THE WRITINGS OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS -- LOSS OF THE AUTOGRAPHS -- GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MANUSCRIPTS

The outstanding qualities of St. John of the Cross's writings were soon recognized by the earliest of their few and privileged readers. All such persons, of course, belonged to a small circle composed of the Saint's intimate friends and disciples. As time went on, the circle widened repeatedly; now it embraces the entire Church, and countless individual souls who are filled with the spirit of Christianity.

First of all, the works were read and discussed in those loci of evangelical zeal which the Saint had himself enkindled, by his word and example, at Beas, El Calvario, Baeza and Granada. They could not have come more opportunely. St. Teresa's Reform had engendered a spiritual alertness and energy reminiscent of the earliest days of Christianity. Before this could in any way diminish, her first friar presented the followers of them both with spiritual food to nourish and re-create their souls and so to sustain the high degree of zeal for Our Lord which He had bestowed upon them.

In one sense, St. John of the Cross took up his pen in order to supplement the writings of St. Teresa; on several subjects, for example, he abstained from writing at length because she had already treated of them.<sup>23</sup> Much of the work of the two Saints, however, of necessity covers the same ground, and thus the great mystical school of the Spanish Carmelites is reinforced at its very beginnings in a way which must be unique in the history of mysticism. The writings of St. Teresa and St. John of the Cross, though of equal value and identical aim, are in many respects very different in their nature; together they cover almost the entire ground of orthodox mysticism, both speculative and experimental. The Carmelite mystics who came after them were able to build upon a broad and sure foundation.

The writings of St. John of the Cross soon became known outside the narrow circle of his sons and daughters in religion. In a few years they had gone all over Spain and reached Portugal, France and Italy. They were read by persons of every social class, from the Empress Maria of Austria, sister of Philip II, to the most unlettered nuns of St. Teresa's most remote foundations. One of the witnesses at the process for the

---

<sup>23</sup>One well-known example will be found in the commentary on the 'Spiritual Canticle,' Chap. xii (cf. ¶ V below).

beatification declared that he knew of no works of which there existed so many copies, with the exception of the Bible.

We may fairly suppose (and the supposition is confirmed by the nature of the extant manuscripts) that the majority of the early copies were made by friars and nuns of the Discalced Reform. Most Discalced houses must have had copies and others were probably in the possession of members of other Orders. We gather, too, from various sources, that even lay persons managed to make or obtain copies of the manuscripts.

How many of these copies, it will be asked, were made directly from the autographs? So vague is the available evidence on this question that it is difficult to attempt any calculation of even approximate reliability. All we can say is that the copies made by, or for, the Discalced friars and nuns themselves are the earliest and most trustworthy, while those intended for the laity were frequently made at third or fourth hand. The Saint himself seems to have written out only one manuscript of each treatise and none of these has come down to us. Some think that he destroyed the manuscripts copied with his own hand, fearing that they might come to be venerated for other reasons than that of the value of their teaching. He was, of course, perfectly capable of such an act of abnegation; once, as we know, in accordance with his own principles, he burned some letters of St. Teresa, which he had carried with him for years, for no other reason than that he realized that he was becoming attached to them.<sup>24</sup>

The only manuscript of his that we possess consists of a few pages of maxims, some letters and one or two documents which he wrote when he was Vicar-Provincial of Andalusia.<sup>25</sup> So numerous and so thorough have been the searches made for further autographs during the last three centuries that further discoveries of any importance seem most unlikely. We have, therefore, to console ourselves with manuscripts, such as the Sanlúcar de Barrameda Codex of the *Spiritual Canticle*, which bear the Saint's autograph corrections as warrants of their integrity.

The vagueness of much of the evidence concerning the manuscripts to which we have referred extends to the farthest possible limit -- that of using the word 'original' to indicate 'autograph' and 'copy' indifferently. Even in the earliest documents we can never be sure which sense is intended. Furthermore, there was a passion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for describing all kinds of old manuscripts as autographs, and thus we find copies so described in which the hand bears not the slightest resemblance to that of the Saint, as the most superficial collation with a genuine specimen of his hand would have made evident. We shall give instances of this in describing the extant copies of individual treatises. One example of a general kind, however, may be quoted here to show the extent to which the practice spread. In a statement made, with reference to one of the processes, at the convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns of Valladolid, a certain M. Mar'a de la Trinidad deposed 'that a servant of God, a Franciscan tertiary named Ana Mar'a, possesses the originals of the books of our holy father, and has heard that he sent them to the Order.' Great importance was attached to this deposition and every possible measure was taken to find the autographs -- needless to say, without result.<sup>26</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup>MS. 12,738, fol. 639.

<sup>25</sup>To these we shall refer in the third volume of this edition.

<sup>26</sup>If any single person could have spoken from knowledge of this matter it would be P. Alonso de la Madre de Dios, as all papers connected with St. John of the Cross passed through his hands and he took hundreds of depositions in connection with the Beatification process. His statements, however (MS. 19,404, fol. 176 [P. Silverio, I, 179]), are as vague as any others. Rather more reliable are the Saint's two

With the multiplication of the number of copies of St. John of the Cross's writings, the number of variants naturally multiplied also. The early copies having all been made for devotional purposes, by persons with little or no palaeographical knowledge, many of whom did not even exercise common care, it is not surprising that there is not a single one which can compare in punctiliousness with certain extant eighteenth-century copies of documents connected with St. John of the Cross and St. Teresa. These were made by a painstaking friar called Manuel de Santa Mar'a, whose scrupulousness went so far that he reproduced imperfectly formed letters exactly as they were written, adding the parts that were lacking (e.g., the *tilde* over the letter *ñ*) with ink of another colour.

We may lament that this good father had no predecessor like himself to copy the Saint's treatises, but it is only right to say that the copies we possess are sufficiently faithful and numerous to give us reasonably accurate versions of their originals. The important point about them is that they bear no signs of bad faith, nor even of the desire (understandable enough in those unscientific days) to clarify the sense of their original, or even to improve upon its teaching. Their errors are often gross ones, but the large majority of them are quite easy to detect and put right. The impression to this effect which one obtains from a casual perusal of almost any of these copies is quite definitely confirmed by a comparison of them with copies corrected by the Saint or written by the closest and most trusted of his disciples. It may be added that some of the variants may, for aught we know to the contrary, be the Saint's own work, since it is not improbable that he may have corrected more than one copy of some of his writings, and not been entirely consistent.

There are, broadly speaking, two classes into which the copies (more particularly those of the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night*) may be divided. One class aims at a more or less exact transcription; the other definitely sets out to abbreviate. Even if the latter class be credited with a number of copies which hardly merit the name, the former is by far the larger, and, of course, the more important, though it must not be supposed that the latter is unworthy of notice. The abbreviators generally omit whole chapters, or passages, at a time, and, where they are not for the moment doing this, or writing the connecting phrases necessary to repair their mischief, they are often quite faithful to their originals. Since they do not, in general, attribute anything to their author that is not his, no objection can be taken, on moral grounds, to their proceeding, though, in actual fact, the results are not always happy. Their ends were purely practical and devotional and they made no attempt to pass their compendia as full-length transcriptions.

With regard to the *Spiritual Canticle* and the *Living Flame of Love*, of each of which there are two redactions bearing indisputable marks of the author's own hand, the classification of the copies will naturally depend upon which redaction each copy the more nearly follows. This question will be discussed in the necessary detail in the introduction to each of these works, and to the individual introductions to the four major treatises we must refer the reader for other details of the manuscripts. In the present pages we have attempted only a general account of these matters. It remains to add that our divisions of each chapter into paragraphs follow the manuscripts throughout except where indicated. The printed editions, as we shall see, suppressed these

---

early biographers, P. JosŽ de Jesu's Mar'a (Quiroga) and P. Jer—nimo de San JosŽ. The former states in one place that he is using an autograph on the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, but again it seems likely that he was mistaken, since the archives of the Reform were still intact in the next century and no genuine autograph of any length was found in them.



divisions, but, apart from their value to the modern reader, they are sufficiently nearly identical in the various copies to form one further testimony to their general high standard of reliability.

#### IV

##### INTEGRITY OF THE SAINT'S WORK -- INCOMPLETE CONDITION OF THE 'ASCENT' AND THE 'NIGHT' -- DISPUTED QUESTIONS

THE principal lacuna in St. John of the Cross's writings, and, from the literary standpoint, the most interesting, is the lack of any commentary to the last five stanzas<sup>27</sup> of the poem 'Dark Night.' Such a commentary is essential to the completion of the plan which the Saint had already traced for himself in what was to be, and, in spite of its unfinished condition, is in fact, his most rigorously scientific treatise. 'All the doctrine,' he wrote in the Argument of the *Ascent*, 'whereof I intend to treat in this *Ascent of Mount Carmel* is included in the following stanzas, and in them is also described the manner of ascending to the summit of the Mount, which is the high estate of perfection which we here call union of the soul with God.' This leaves no doubt but that the Saint intended to treat the mystical life as one whole, and to deal in turn with each stage of the road to perfection, from the beginnings of the Purgative Way to the crown and summit of the life of Union. After showing the need for such a treatise as he proposes to write, he divides the chapters on Purgation into four parts corresponding to the Active and Passive nights of Sense and of Spirit. These, however, correspond only to the first two stanzas of his poem; they are not, as we shall shortly see, complete, but their incompleteness is slight compared with that of the work as a whole.

Did St. John of the Cross, we may ask, ever write a commentary on those last five stanzas, which begin with a description of the state of Illumination:

**'Twas that light guided me,  
More surely than the noonday's brightest glare --**

and end with that of the life of Union:

**All things for me that day  
Ceas'd, as I slumber'd there,  
Amid the lilies drowning all my care?**

If we suppose that he did, we are faced with the question of its fate and with the strange fact that none of his contemporaries makes any mention of such a commentary, though they are all prolific in details of far less importance.

Conjectures have been ventured on this question ever since critical methods first began to be applied to St. John of the Cross's writings. A great deal was written about it by P. Andržs de la Encarnaci—n, to whom his superiors entrusted the task of collecting and editing the Saint's writings, and whose findings, though they suffer from the defects

---

<sup>27</sup>[The commentary on the third stanza is begun in ii, xxv of *Dark Night*. If this be not counted, the number of stanzas left uncommented is six.]

of an age which from a modern standpoint must be called unscientific, and need therefore to be read with the greatest caution, are often surprisingly just and accurate. P. Andržs begins by referring to various places where St. John of the Cross states that he has treated certain subjects and proposes to treat others, about which nothing can be found in his writings. This, he says, may often be due to an oversight on the writer's part or to changes which new experiences might have brought to his mode of thinking. On the other hand, there are sometimes signs that these promises have been fulfilled: the sharp truncation of the argument, for example, at the end of Book III of the *Ascent* suggests that at least a few pages are missing, in which case the original manuscript must have been mutilated,<sup>28</sup> for almost all the extant copies break off at the same word. It is unthinkable, as P. Andržs says, that the Saint 'should have gone on to write the *Night* without completing the *Ascent*, for all these five books<sup>29</sup> are integral parts of one whole, since they all treat of different stages of one spiritual path.'<sup>30</sup>

It may be argued in the same way that St. John of the Cross would not have gone on to write the commentaries on the 'Spiritual Canticle' and the 'Living Flame of Love' without first completing the *Dark Night*. P. Andržs goes so far as to say that the very unwillingness which the Saint displayed towards writing commentaries on the two latter poems indicates that he had already completed the others; otherwise, he could easily have excused himself from the later task on the plea that he had still to finish the earlier.

Again, St. John of the Cross declares very definitely, in the prologue to the *Dark Night*, that, after describing in the commentary on the first two stanzas the effects of the two passive purgations of the sensual and the spiritual part of man, he will devote the six remaining stanzas to expounding 'various and wondrous effects of the spiritual illumination and union of love with God.' Nothing could be clearer than this. Now, in the commentary on the 'Living Flame,' argues P. Andržs, he treats at considerable length of simple contemplation and adds that he has written fully of it in several chapters of the *Ascent* and the *Night*, which he names; but not only do we not find the references in two of the chapters enumerated by him, but he makes no mention of several other chapters in which the references are of considerable fullness. The proper deductions from these facts would seem to be, first, that we do not possess the *Ascent* and the *Night* in the form in which the Saint wrote them, and, second, that in the missing chapters he referred to the subject under discussion at much greater length than in the chapters we have.

Further, the practice of St. John of the Cross was not to omit any part of his commentaries when for any reason he was unable or unwilling to write them at length, but rather to abbreviate them. Thus, he runs rapidly through the third stanza of the *Night* and through the fourth stanza of the *Living Flame*: we should expect him in the same way to treat the last three stanzas of the *Night* with similar brevity and rapidity, but not to omit them altogether.

Such are the principal arguments used by P. Andržs which have inclined many critics to the belief that St. John of the Cross completed these treatises. Other of his

---

<sup>28</sup>This is not so unlikely as it may seem, for the early manuscripts were all either unbound, or very roughly stitched together, and several of the extant copies have leaves missing. It was not till the time of the Beatification Process that greater care began to be taken of the Saint's writings, and they were bound strongly and even luxuriously.

<sup>29</sup>i.e., the three books of the *Ascent* and the two of the *Night*.

<sup>30</sup>MS. 3,180, Adici—n B.

arguments, which to himself were even more convincing, have now lost much weight. The chief of these are the contention that, because a certain Fray Agust'n Antol'nez (b. 1554), in expounding these same poems, makes no mention of the Saint's having failed to expound five stanzas of the *Night*, he did therefore write an exposition of them;<sup>31</sup> and the supposition that the *Living Flame* was written before the *Spiritual Canticle*, and that therefore, when the prologue to the *Living Flame* says that the author has already described the highest state of perfection attainable in this life, it cannot be referring to the *Canticle* and must necessarily allude to passages, now lost, from the *Dark Night*.<sup>32</sup>

Our own judgment upon this much debated question is not easily delivered. On the one hand, the reasons why St. John of the Cross should have completed his work are perfectly sound ones and his own words in the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* are a clear statement of his intentions. Furthermore, he had ample time to complete it, for he wrote other treatises at a later date and he certainly considered the latter part of the *Dark Night* to be more important than the former. On the other hand, it is disconcerting to find not even the briefest clear reference to this latter part in any of his subsequent writings, when both the *Living Flame* and the *Spiritual Canticle* offered so many occasions for such a reference to an author accustomed to refer his readers to his other treatises. Again, his contemporaries, who were keenly interested in his work, and mention such insignificant things as the *Cautions*, the *Maxims* and the 'Mount of Perfection,' say nothing whatever of the missing chapters. None of his biographers speaks of them, nor does P. Alonso de la Madre de Dios, who examined the Saint's writings in detail immediately after his death and was in touch with his closest friends and companions. We are inclined, therefore, to think that the chapters in question were never written.<sup>33</sup> Is not the following sequence of probable facts the most tenable? We know from P. Juan Evangelista that the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* were written at different times, with many intervals of short or long duration. The Saint may well have entered upon the *Spiritual Canticle*, which was a concession to the affectionate importunity of M. Ann de Jesoës, with every intention of returning later to finish his earlier treatise. But, having completed the *Canticle*, he may equally well have been struck with the similarity between a part of it and the unwritten commentary on the earlier stanzas, and this may have decided him that the *Dark Night* needed no completion, especially as the *Living Flame* also described the life of Union. This hypothesis will explain all the facts, and seems completely in harmony with all we know of St. John of the Cross, who was in no sense, as we have already said, a writer by profession. If we accept it, we need not necessarily share the views which we here assume to have been his. Not only would the completion of the *Dark Night* have given us new ways of approach to so sublime and intricate a theme, but this would have been

---

<sup>31</sup>It would be natural enough, of course, for Fray Agust'n Antol'nez to have noted this fact, but, as he makes no mention of St. John of the Cross at all, nothing can be safely inferred from his silence. It may be added that Fray Agust'n's commentary is to be published by the Spanish Augustinians [and that P. Silverio (I, 190-3) gives a specimen of it which shows how well it deserves publication].

<sup>32</sup>As we shall later see, the *Living Flame* was written after the first redaction of the *Spiritual Canticle*, but before the second redaction, which mentions the *Living Flame* in the exposition of Stanza XXXI, thus misleading P. AndrŽs as to its date. There is no doubt, in our mind, that the reference in the preface to the *Living Flame* is to the *Canticle*: the description fits it exactly.

<sup>33</sup>[P. Silverio's words are: 'For my own part, I think it very probable that he never composed them.' I myself give a little less weight to the negative evidence brought forward, and, though I too am inclined to the negative solution, I should hold the scales between the two rather more evenly.]

treated in a way more closely connected with the earlier stages of the mystical life than was possible in either the *Living Flame* or the *Canticle*.

We ought perhaps to notice one further supposition of P. Andržs, which has been taken up by a number of later critics: that St. John of the Cross completed the commentary which we know as the *Dark Night*, but that on account of the distinctive nature of the contents of the part now lost he gave it a separate title.<sup>34</sup> The only advantage of this theory seems to be that it makes the hypothesis of the loss of the commentary less improbable. In other respects it is as unsatisfactory as the theory of P. Andržs,<sup>35</sup> of which we find a variant in M. Baruzi,<sup>36</sup> that the Saint thought the commentary too bold, and too sublime, to be perpetuated, and therefore destroyed it, or, at least, forbade its being copied. It is surely unlikely that the sublimity of these missing chapters would exceed that of the *Canticle* or the *Living Flame*.

This seems the most suitable place to discuss a feature of the works of St. John of the Cross to which allusion is often made -- the little interest which he took in their division into books and chapters and his lack of consistency in observing such divisions when he had once made them. A number of examples may be cited. In the first chapter of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, using the words 'part' and 'book' as synonyms, he makes it clear that the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* are to him one single treatise. 'The first night or purgation,' he writes, 'is of the sensual part of the soul, which is treated in the present stanza, and will be treated in the first part of this book. And the second is of the spiritual part; of this speaks the second stanza, which follows; and of this we shall treat likewise, in the second and the third part, with respect to the activity of the soul; and in the fourth part, with respect to its passivity.'<sup>37</sup> The author's intention here is evident. Purgation may be sensual or spiritual, and each of these kinds may be either active or passive. The most logical proceeding would be to divide the whole of the material into four parts or books: two to be devoted to active purgation and two to passive.<sup>38</sup> St. John of the Cross, however, devotes two parts to active spiritual purgation -- one to that of the understanding and the other to that of the memory and the will. In the *Night*, on the other hand, where it would seem essential to devote one book to the passive purgation of sense and another to that of spirit, he includes both in one part, the fourth. In the *Ascent*, he divides the content of each of his books into various chapters; in the *Night*, where the argument is developed like that of the *Ascent*, he makes a division into paragraphs only, and a very irregular division at that, if we may judge by the copies that have reached us. In the *Spiritual Canticle* and the *Living Flame* he dispenses with both chapters and paragraphs. The commentary on each stanza here

---

<sup>34</sup>If this were so, we might even hazard a guess that the title was that given in the *Living Flame* (I, 21) and not exactly applicable to any of the existing treatises, viz. *The Dark Night of the Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

<sup>35</sup>*Memorias Historiales*, C. 1 3.

<sup>36</sup>*Saint Jean de la Croix*, pp. 1 3-15.

<sup>37</sup>Cf. *Ascent*, I, i, below.

<sup>38</sup>Some manuscripts do in fact divide the treatise in this way; but apart from the fact that we have the authority of St. John of the Cross himself, in the passage just quoted (confirmed in *Ascent*, I, xiii), for a different division, the Alcaudete MS., which we believe to be the most reliable, follows the division laid down by the Saint. We may add that St. John of the Cross is not always a safe guide in these matters, no doubt because he trusted too much to his memory; in *Ascent*, II, xi, for example, he calls the fourth book the third.

corresponds to a chapter.

Another example is to be found in the arrangement of his expositions. As a rule, he first writes down the stanzas as a whole, then repeats each in turn before expounding it, and repeats each line also in its proper place in the same way. At the beginning of each treatise he makes some general observations -- in the form either of an argument and prologue, as in the *Ascent*; of a prologue and general exposition, as in the *Night*; of a prologue alone, as in the first redaction of the *Canticle* and in the *Living Flame*; or of a prologue and argument, as in the second redaction of the *Canticle*. In the *Ascent* and the *Night*, the first chapter of each book contains the 'exposition of the stanzas,' though some copies describe this, in Book III of the *Ascent*, as an 'argument.' In the *Night*, the book dealing with the Night of Sense begins with the usual 'exposition'; that of the Night of the Spirit, however, has nothing to correspond with it.

In the first redaction of the *Spiritual Canticle*, St. John of the Cross first sets down the poem, then a few lines of 'exposition' giving the argument of the stanza, and finally the commentary upon each line. Sometimes he comments upon two or three lines at once. In the second redaction, he prefaces almost every stanza with an 'annotation,' of which there is none in the first redaction except before the commentary on the thirteenth and fourteenth stanzas. The chief purpose of the 'annotation' is to link the argument of each stanza with that of the stanza preceding it; occasionally the annotation and the exposition are combined.

It is clear from all this that, in spite of his orderly mind, St. John of the Cross was no believer in strict uniformity in matters of arrangement which would seem to demand such uniformity once they had been decided upon. They are, of course, of secondary importance, but the fact that the inconsistencies are the work of St. John of the Cross himself, and not merely of careless copyists, who have enough else to account for, is of real moment in the discussion of critical questions which turn on the Saint's accuracy.

Another characteristic of these commentaries is the inequality of length as between the exposition of certain lines and stanzas. While some of these are dealt with fully, the exposition of others is brought to a close with surprising rapidity, even though it sometimes seems that much more needs to be said: we get the impression that the author was anxious to push his work forward or was pressed for time. He devotes fourteen long chapters of the *Ascent* to glossing the first two lines of the first stanza and dismisses the three remaining lines in a few sentences. In both the *Ascent* and the *Night*, indeed, the stanzas appear to serve only as a pretext for introducing the great wealth of ascetic and mystical teaching which the Saint has gathered together. In the *Canticle* and the *Living Flame*, on the other hand, he keeps much closer to his stanzas, though here, too, there is a considerable inequality. One result of the difference in nature between these two pairs of treatises is that the *Ascent* and the *Night* are more solidly built and more rigidly doctrinal, whereas in the *Canticle* and the *Flame* there is more movement and more poetry.

## V

### HISTORY OF THE PUBLICATION OF ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS'S WRITINGS -- THE FIRST EDITION

IT seems strange that mystical works of such surpassing value should not have been

published till twenty-seven years after their author's death, for not only were the manuscript copies insufficient to propagate them as widely as those who made them would have desired, but the multiplication of these copies led to an ever greater number of variants in the text. Had it but been possible for the first edition of them to have been published while their author still lived, we might to-day have a perfect text. But the probability is that, if such an idea had occurred to St. John of the Cross, he would have set it aside as presumptuous. In allowing copies to be made he doubtless never envisaged their going beyond the limited circle of his Order.

We have found no documentary trace of any project for an edition of these works during their author's lifetime. The most natural time for a discussion of the matter would have been in September 1586, when the Definitors of the Order, among whom was St. John of the Cross, met in Madrid and decided to publish the works of St. Teresa.<sup>39</sup> Two years earlier, when he was writing the *Spiritual Canticle*, St. John of the Cross had expressed a desire for the publication of St. Teresa's writings and assumed that this would not be long delayed.<sup>40</sup> As we have seen, he considered his own works as complementary to those of St. Teresa,<sup>41</sup> and one would have thought that the simultaneous publication of the writings of the two Reformers would have seemed to the Definitors an excellent idea.

After his death, it is probable that there was no one at first who was both able and willing to undertake the work of editor; for, as is well known, towards the end of his life the Saint had powerful enemies within his Order who might well have opposed the project, though, to do the Discalced Reform justice, it was brought up as early as ten years after his death. A resolution was passed at the Chapter-General of the Reform held in September 1601, to the effect 'that the works of Fr. Juan de la Cruz be printed and that the Definitors, Fr. Juan de Jes  s Mar  a and Fr. Tom  s [de Jes  s], be instructed to examine and approve them.'<sup>42</sup> Two years later (July 4, 1603), the same Chapter, also meeting in Madrid, 'gave leave to the Definitor, Fr. Tom  s [de Jes  s], for the printing of the works of Fr. Juan de la Cruz, first friar of the Discalced Reform.'<sup>43</sup>

It is not known (since the Chapter Book is no longer extant) why the matter lapsed for two years, but Fr. Tom  s de Jes  s, the Definitor to whom alone it was entrusted on the second occasion, was a most able man, well qualified to edit the works of his predecessor.<sup>44</sup> Why, then, we may wonder, did he not do so? The story of his life in the years following the commission may partly answer this question. His definitorship came to an end in 1604, when he was elected Prior of the 'desert' of San Jos   de las Batuecas. After completing the customary three years in this office, during which time he could have done no work at all upon the edition, he was elected Prior of the Discalced house at Zaragoza. But at this point Paul V sent for him to Rome and from that time onward his life followed other channels.

The next attempt to accomplish the project was successful. The story begins with

---

<sup>39</sup>[H., V, iii.]

<sup>40</sup>*Spiritual Canticle*, Stanza XII,    6 [Second Redaction, XIII,    7].

<sup>41</sup>In the same passage as that referred to in the last note he declares his intention of not repeating what she has said (cf. General Introduction, III, above ).

<sup>42</sup>Our authority for this statement is P. Andres de la Encarnaci  n (*Memorias Historiales*, B. 32), who found the Chapter Book in the General Archives of the Reform at Madrid.

<sup>43</sup>Op. cit. (B. 33).

<sup>44</sup>[For a study of Tom  s de Jes  s, see S.S.M., II, 281-306.]

a meeting between the Definitors of the Order and Fr. JosŽ de Jesœs Mar'a, the General, at VŹlez-Młlaga, where a new decision to publish the works of St. John of the Cross was taken and put into effect (as a later resolution has it) 'without any delay or condition whatsoever.'<sup>45</sup> The enterprise suffered a setback, only a week after it had been planned, in the death of the learned Jesuit P. SuŹrez, who was on terms of close friendship with the Discalced and had been appointed one of the censors. But P. Diego de Jesœs (Salablanca), Prior of the Discalced house at Toledo, to whom its execution was entrusted, lost no time in accomplishing his task; indeed, one would suppose that he had begun it long before, since early in the next year it was completed and published in Alcalł. The volume, entitled *Spiritual Works which lead a soul to perfect union with God*, has 720 pages and bears the date 1618. The works are preceded by a preface addressed to the reader and a brief summary of the author's 'life and virtues.' An engraving of the 'Mount of Perfection' is included.<sup>46</sup>

There are several peculiarities about this *editio princeps*. In the first place, although the pagination is continuous, it was the work of two different printers; the reason for this is quite unknown, though various reasons might be suggested. The greatest care was evidently taken so that the work should be well and truly approved: it is recommended, in terms of the highest praise, by the authorities of the University of Alcalł, who, at the request of the General of the Discalced Carmelites, had submitted it for examination to four of the professors of that University. No doubt for reasons of safety, the *Spiritual Canticle* was not included in that edition: it was too much like a commentary on the *Song of Songs* for such a proceeding to be just then advisable.

We have now to enquire into the merits of the edition of P. Salablanca, which met with such warm approval on its publication, yet very soon afterwards began to be recognized as defective and is little esteemed for its intrinsic qualities to-day.

It must, of course, be realized that critical standards in the early seventeenth century were low and that the first editor of St. John of the Cross had neither the method nor the available material of the twentieth century. Nor were the times favourable for the publication of the works of a great mystic who attempted fearlessly and fully to describe the highest stages of perfection on the road to God. These two facts are responsible for most of the defects of the edition.

For nearly a century, the great peril associated with the mystical life had been that of Illuminism, a gross form of pseudo-mysticism which had claimed many victims among the holiest and most learned, and of which there was such fear that excessive, almost unbelievable, precautions had been taken against it. These precautions, together with the frequency and audacity with which Illuminists invoked the authority and protection of well-known contemporary ascetic and mystical writers, give reality to P. Salablanca's fear lest the leaders of the sect might shelter themselves behind the doctrines of St. John of the Cross and so call forth the censure of the Inquisition upon passages which seemed to him to bear close relation to their erroneous teaching. It was for this definite reason, and not because of an arbitrary meticulousness, that P. Salablanca omitted or adapted such passages as those noted in Book I, Chapter viii of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* and in a number of chapters in Book II. A study of these, all of which are indicated in the footnotes to our text, is of great interest.

---

<sup>45</sup>*Memorias Historiales*, B. 35.

<sup>46</sup>Cf. General Introduction, I, above.

Less important are a large number of minor corrections made with the intention of giving greater precision to some theological concept; the omission of lines and even paragraphs which the editor considered redundant, as in fact they frequently are; and corrections made with the aim of lending greater clearness to the argument or improving the style. A few changes were made out of prudery: such are the use of *sensitivo* for *sensual*, the suppression of phrases dealing with carnal vice and the omission of several paragraphs from that chapter of the *Dark Night* -- which speaks of the third deadly sin of beginners. There was little enough reason for these changes: St. John of the Cross is particularly inoffensive in his diction and may, from that point of view, be read by a child.

The sum total of P. Salablanca's mutilations is very considerable. There are more in the *Ascent* and the *Living Flame* than in the *Dark Night*; but hardly a page of the *editio princeps* is free from them and on most pages they abound. It need not be said that they are regrettable. They belong to an age when the garments of dead saints were cut up into small fragments and distributed among the devout and when their cells were decked out with indifferent taste and converted into oratories. It would not have been considered sufficient had the editor printed the text of St. John of the Cross as he found it and glossed it to his liking in footnotes; another editor would have put opposite interpretations upon it, thus cancelling out the work of his predecessor. Even the radical mutilations of P. Salablanca did not suffice, as will now be seen, to protect the works of the Saint from the Inquisition.

## VI

### DENUNCIATION OF THE 'WORKS' TO THE INQUISITION -- DEFENCE OF THEM MADE BY FR. BASILO PONCE DE LEÏN -- EDITIONS OF THE SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES

NEITHER the commendations of University professors nor the scissors of a meticulous editor could save the treatises of St. John of the Cross from that particular form of attack which, more than all others, was feared in the seventeenth century. We shall say nothing here of the history, nature and procedure of the Spanish Inquisition, which has had its outspoken antagonists and its unreasoning defenders but has not yet been studied with impartiality. It must suffice to set down the facts as they here affect our subject.

Forty propositions, then, were extracted from the edition of 1618 and presented to the Holy Office for condemnation with the object of causing the withdrawal of the edition from circulation. The attempt would probably have succeeded but for the warm, vigorous and learned defence put up by the Augustinian Fray Basilio Ponce de Le—n, a theological professor in the University of Salamanca and a nephew of the Luis de Le—n who wrote the *Names of Christ* and took so great an interest in the works of St. Teresa.<sup>47</sup>

It was in the very convent of San Felipe in Madrid where thirty-five years earlier

---

<sup>47</sup>[Cf. S.S.M., I (1927), 291-344; (1951), 235-79. An abridged English edition of the *Names of Christ*, translated by a Benedictine of Stanbrook, was published by Messrs. Burns Oates and Washbourne in 1926.]



Fray Luis had written his immortal eulogy of St. Teresa<sup>48</sup> that Fray Basilio, on July 11, 1622, signed a most interesting 'Reply' to the objections which had been raised to the Alcalá edition of St. John of the Cross. Although we propose, in our third volume, to reproduce Fray Basilio's defence, it is necessary to our narrative to say something of it here, for it is the most important of all extant documents which reveal the vicissitudes in the history of the Saint's teaching.

Before entering upon an examination of the censured propositions, the learned Augustinian makes some general observations, which must have carried great weight as coming from so high a theological authority. He recalls the commendations of the edition by the professors of the University of Alcalá 'where the faculty of theology is so famous,' and by many others, including several ministers of the Holy Office and two Dominicans who 'without dispute are among the most learned of their Order.' Secondly, he refers to the eminently saintly character of the first friar of the Discalced Reform: 'it is not to be presumed that God would set a man whose teaching is so evil . . . as is alleged, to be the corner-stone of so great a building.' Thirdly, he notes how close a follower was St. John of the Cross of St. Teresa, a person who was singularly free from any taint of unorthodoxy. And finally he recalls a number of similar attacks on works of this kind, notably that on Laredo's *Ascent of Mount Sion*,<sup>49</sup> which have proved to be devoid of foundation, and points out that isolated 'propositions' need to be set in their context before they can be fairly judged.

Fray Basilio next refutes the charges brought against the works of St. John of the Cross, nearly all of which relate to his teaching on the passivity of the faculties in certain degrees of contemplation. Each proposition he copies and afterwards defends, both by argument and by quotations from the Fathers, from the medieval mystics and from his own contemporaries. It is noteworthy that among these authorities he invariably includes St. Teresa, who had been beatified in 1614, and enjoyed an undisputed reputation. This inclusion, as well as being an enhancement of his defence, affords a striking demonstration of the unity of thought existing between the two great Carmelites.

Having expounded the orthodox Catholic teaching in regard to these matters, and shown that the teaching of St. John of the Cross is in agreement with it, Fray Basilio goes on to make clear the true attitude of the Illuminists and thus to reinforce his contentions by showing how far removed from this is the Saint's doctrine.

Fray Basilio's magnificent defence of St. John of the Cross appears to have had the unusual effect of quashing the attack entirely: the excellence of his arguments, backed by his great authority, was evidently unanswerable. So far as we know, the Inquisition took no proceedings against the Alcalá edition whatsoever. Had this at any time been prohibited, we may be sure that Llorente would have revealed the fact, and, though he refers to the persecution of St. John of the Cross during his lifetime,<sup>50</sup> he is quite silent about any posthumous condemnation of his writings.

The *editio princeps* was reprinted in 1619, with a different pagination and a few corrections, in Barcelona.<sup>51</sup> Before these two editions were out of print, the General of

---

<sup>48</sup>[Cf. S.S.M., I (1927), 295-6; (1951), 240.]

<sup>49</sup>[Cf. S.S.M., II, 41-76.]

<sup>50</sup>*Historia crítica de la Inquisición de España*, Vol. V, Chap. xxx, and elsewhere. [The original of this work is in French: *Histoire critique de l'Inquisition d'Espagne*, 1817-18.]

<sup>51</sup>Here we have a curious parallelism with the works of St. Teresa, first published at Salamanca in 1588

the Discalced Carmelites had entrusted an able historian of the Reform, Fray Jer—nimo de San JosŽ, with the preparation of a new one. This was published at Madrid, in 1630. It has a short introduction describing its scope and general nature, a number of new and influential commendations and an admirable fifty-page 'sketch' of St. John of the Cross by the editor which has been reproduced in most subsequent editions and has probably done more than any other single work to make known the facts of the Saint's biography. The great feature of this edition, however, is the inclusion of the *Spiritual Cantic*, placed (by an error, as a printer's note explains) at the end of the volume, instead of before the *Living Flame*, which is, of course, its proper position.

The inclusion of the *Cantic* is one of the two merits that the editor claims for his new edition. The other is that he 'prints both the *Cantic* and the other works according to their original manuscripts, written in the hand of the same venerable author.' This claim is, of course, greatly exaggerated, as what has been said above with regard to the manuscripts will indicate. Not only does Fray Jer—nimo appear to have had no genuine original manuscript at all, but of the omissions of the *editio princeps* it is doubtful if he makes good many more than one in a hundred. In fact, with very occasional exceptions, he merely reproduces the *princeps* -- omissions, interpolations, well-meant improvements and all.<sup>52</sup>

In Fray Jer—nimo's defence it must be said that the reasons which moved his predecessor to mutilate his edition were still potent, and the times had not changed. It is more surprising that for nearly three centuries the edition of 1630 should have been followed by later editors. The numerous versions of the works which saw the light in the later seventeenth and the eighteenth century added a few poems, letters and maxims to the corpus of work which he presented and which assumed great importance as the Saint became better known and more deeply venerated. But they did no more. It suffices, therefore, to enumerate the chief of them.

The Barcelona publisher of the 1619 edition produced a new edition in 1635, which is a mere reproduction of that of 1630. A Madrid edition of 1649, which adds nine letters, a hundred maxims and a small collection of poems, was reproduced in 1672 (Madrid), 1679 (Madrid), 1693 (Barcelona) and 1694 (Madrid), the last reproduction being in two volumes. An edition was also published in Barcelona in 1700.

If we disregard a 'compendium' of the Saint's writings published in Seville in 1701, the first eighteenth-century edition was published in Seville in 1703 -- the most interesting of those that had seen the light since 1630. It is well printed on good paper in a folio volume and its editor, Fr. AndrŽs de Jesu's Mar'a, claims it, on several grounds, as an advance on preceding editions. First, he says, 'innumerable errors of great importance' have been corrected in it; then, the *Spiritual Cantic* has been amended according to its original manuscript 'in the hand of the same holy doctor, our father, kept and venerated in our convent of Discalced Carmelite nuns at JaŽn'; next, he adds two new poems and increases the number of maxims from 100 to 365; and lastly, the letters are increased from nine to seventeen, all of which are found in P. Jer—nimo de San JosŽ's history. The first of these claims is as great an exaggeration as was P. Jer—nimo's; to the second we shall refer in our introduction to the *Spiritual Cantic*. The third

---

and also reprinted in Barcelona in the year following.

<sup>52</sup>He also supplies the Latin text of Scriptural quotations which St. John of the Cross gives in the vernacular, corrects the punctuation and spelling of the *princeps* and substitutes his 'Sketch' of the Saint's life for the biographical notes of that edition. The treatise in which he corrects most of the defects of the *princeps* is the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*.

and fourth, however, are justified, and for these, as for a few minor improvements, the editor deserves every commendation.

The remaining years of the eighteenth century produced few editions; apart from a reprint (1724) of the compendium of 1701, the only one known to us is that published at Pamplona in 1774, after which nearly eighty years were to pass before any earlier edition was so much as reprinted. Before we resume this bibliographical narrative, however, we must go back over some earlier history.

## VII

### NEW DENUNCIATIONS AND DEFENCES -- FRAY NICOLÁS DE JESÚS MARÍA -- THE CARMELITE SCHOOL AND THE INQUISITION

WE remarked, apropos of the edition of 1630, that the reasons which led Fray Diego de Jesúes to mutilate his texts were still in existence when Fray Jerónimo de San José prepared his edition some twelve years later. If any independent proof of this statement is needed, it may be found in the numerous apologias that were published during the seventeenth century, not only in Spain, but in Italy, France, Germany and other countries of Europe. If doctrines are not attacked, there is no occasion to write vigorous defences of them.

Following the example of Fray Basilio Ponce de León, a professor of theology in the College of the Reform at Salamanca, Fray Nicolás de Jesúes María, wrote a learned Latin defence of St. John of the Cross in 1631, often referred to briefly as the *Elucidatio*.<sup>53</sup> It is divided into two parts, the first defending the Saint against charges of a general kind that were brought against his writings, and the second upholding censured propositions taken from them. On the general ground, P. Nicolás reminds his readers that many writers who now enjoy the highest possible reputation were in their time denounced and unjustly persecuted. St. Jerome was attacked for his translation of the Bible from Hebrew into Latin; St. Augustine, for his teaching about grace and free-will. The works of St. Gregory the Great were burned at Rome; those of St. Thomas Aquinas at Paris. Most mediaeval and modern mystics have been the victims of persecution -- Ruysbroeck, Tauler and even St. Teresa. Such happenings, he maintains, have done nothing to lessen the eventual prestige of these authors, but rather have added to it.

Nor, he continues, can the works of any author fairly be censured, because misguided teachers make use of them to propagate their false teaching. No book has been more misused by heretics than Holy Scripture and few books of value would escape if we were to condemn all that had been so treated. Equally worthless is the objection that mystical literature is full of difficulties which may cause the ignorant and pusillanimous to stumble. Apart from the fact that St. John of the Cross is clearer and more lucid than most of his contemporaries, and that therefore the works of many of them would have to follow his own into oblivion, the same argument might again be applied to the Scriptures. Who can estimate the good imparted by the sacred books to those who read them in a spirit of uprightness and simplicity? Yet what books are more pregnant with mystery and with truths that are difficult and, humanly speaking, even

---

<sup>53</sup>*Phrasium mysticae Theologiae V.P. Fr. Joannis a Cruce, Carmelitarum exalceatorum Parentis primi elucidatio*. Compluti, 1631.

inaccessible?

But (continues P. Nicol s), even if we allow that parts of the work of St. John of the Cross, for all the clarity of his exposition, are obscure to the general reader, it must be remembered that much more is of the greatest attraction and profit to all. On the one hand, the writings of the Saint represent the purest sublimation of Divine love in the pilgrim soul, and are therefore food for the most advanced upon the mystic way. On the other, every reader, however slight his spiritual progress, can understand the Saint's ascetic teaching: his chapters on the purgation of the senses, mortification, detachment from all that belongs to the earth, purity of conscience, the practice of the virtues, and so on. The Saint's greatest enemy is not the obscurity of his teaching but the inflexible logic with which he deduces, from the fundamental principles of evangelical perfection, the consequences which must be observed by those who would scale the Mount. So straight and so hard is the road which he maps out for the climber that the majority of those who see it are at once dismayed.

These are the main lines of P. Nicol s' argument, which he develops at great length. We must refer briefly to the chapter in which he makes a careful synthesis of the teaching of the Illuminists, to show how far it is removed from that of St. John of the Cross. He divides these false contemplatives into four classes. In the first class he places those who suppress all their acts, both interior and exterior, in prayer. In the second, those who give themselves up to a state of pure quiet, with no loving attention to God. In the third, those who allow their bodies to indulge every craving and maintain that, in the state of spiritual intoxication which they have reached, they are unable to commit sin. In the fourth, those who consider themselves to be instruments of God and adopt an attitude of complete passivity, maintaining also that they are unable to sin, because God alone is working in them. The division is more subtle than practical, for the devotees of this sect, with few exceptions, professed the same erroneous beliefs and tended to the same degree of licence in their conduct. But, by isolating these tenets, P. Nicol s is the better able to show the antithesis between them and those of St. John of the Cross.

In the second part of the *Elucidatio*, he analyses the propositions already treated by Fray Basilio Ponce de Le n, reducing them to twenty and dealing faithfully with them in the same number of chapters. His defence is clear, methodical and convincing and follows similar lines to those adopted by Fray Basilio, to whom its author acknowledges his indebtedness.

Another of St. John of the Cross's apologists is Fray Jos  de Jes es Mar a (Quiroga), who, in a number of his works,<sup>54</sup> both defends and eulogizes him, without going into any detailed examination of the propositions. Fray Jos  is an outstanding example of a very large class of writers, for, as Illuminism gave place to Quietism, the teaching of St. John of the Cross became more and more violently impugned and almost all mystical writers of the time referred to him. Perhaps we should single out, from among his defenders outside the Carmelite Order, that Augustinian father, P. Antol nez, to whose commentary on three of the Saint's works we have already made reference.

As the school of mystical writers within the Discalced Carmelite Reform gradually

---

<sup>54</sup> *Subida del Alma a Dios; Apolog a m stica en defensa de la contemplaci n divina; Don que tuvo San Juan de la Cruz para guiar las almas*, etc.

grew -- a school which took St. John of the Cross as its leader and is one of the most illustrious in the history of mystical theology -- it began to share in the same persecution as had befallen its founder. It is impossible, in a few words, to describe this epoch of purgation, and indeed it can only be properly studied in its proper context -- the religious history of the period as a whole. For our purpose, it suffices to say that the works of St. John of the Cross were once more denounced to the Inquisition, though, once more, no notice appears to have been taken of the denunciations, for there exists no record ordering the expurgation or prohibition of the books referred to. The *Elucidatio* was also denounced, together with several of the works of P. JosŽ de Jesœs Mar'a, at various times in the seventeenth century, and these attacks were of course equivalent to direct attacks on St. John of the Cross. One of the most vehement onslaughts made was levelled against P. JosŽ's *Subida del Alma a Dios* ('Ascent of the Soul to God'), which is in effect an elaborate commentary on St. John of the Cross's teaching. The Spanish Inquisition refusing to censure the book, an appeal against it was made to the Inquisition at Rome. When no satisfaction was obtained in this quarter, P. JosŽ's opponents went to the Pope, who referred the matter to the Sacred Congregation of the Index; but this body issued a warm eulogy of the book and the matter thereupon dropped.

In spite of such defeats, the opponents of the Carmelite school continued their work into the eighteenth century. In 1740, a new appeal was made to the Spanish Inquisition to censure P. JosŽ's *Subida*. A document of seventy-three folios denounced no less than one hundred and sixty-five propositions which it claimed to have taken direct from the work referred to, and this time, after a conflict extending over ten years, the book (described as 'falsely attributed' to P. JosŽ<sup>55</sup>) was condemned (July 4, 1750), as 'containing doctrine most perilous in practice, and propositions similar and equivalent to those condemned in Miguel de Molinos.'

We set down the salient facts of this controversy, without commenting upon them, as an instance of the attitude of the eighteenth century towards the mystics in general, and, in particular, towards the school of the Discalced Carmelites. In view of the state and tendencies of thought in these times, the fact of the persecution, and the degree of success that it attained, is not surprising. The important point to bear in mind is that it must be taken into account continually by students of the editions of the Saint's writings and of the history of his teaching throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## VIII

### FURTHER HISTORY OF THE EDITIONS -- P. ANDRÉS DE LA ENCARNACIÓN -- EDITIONS OF THE NINETEENTH AND TWENTIETH CENTURIES

WHAT has just been said will fully explain the paucity of the editions of St. John of the Cross which we find in the eighteenth century. This century, however, was, scientifically speaking, one of great progress. Critical methods of study developed and became widespread; and there was a great desire to obtain purer and more nearly perfect texts

---

<sup>55</sup>This phrase, no doubt, was inserted in order to save the reputation of P. JosŽ's earlier supporters, and out of respect to his uncle, who had been a Cardinal and Inquisitor-General.

and to discover the original sources of the ideas of great thinkers. These tendencies made themselves felt within the Discalced Carmelite Order, and there also arose a great ambition to republish in their original forms the works both of St. Teresa and of St. John of the Cross. The need was greater in the latter case than in the former; so urgent was it felt to be as to admit of no delay. 'There have been discovered in the works [of St. John of the Cross],' says a document of about 1753, 'many errors, mutilations and other defects the existence of which cannot be denied.'<sup>56</sup> The religious who wrote thus to the Chapter-General of the Reform set out definite and practical schemes for a thorough revision of these works, which were at once accepted. There thus comes into our history that noteworthy friar, P. Andr zs de la Encarnaci n, to whom we owe so much of what we know about the Saint to-day. P. Andr zs was no great stylist, nor had he the usual Spanish fluency of diction. But he was patient, modest and industrious, and above all he was endowed with a double portion of the critical spirit of the eighteenth century. He was selected for the work of investigation as being by far the fittest person who could be found for it. A decree dated October 6, 1754 ordered him to set to work. As a necessary preliminary to the task of preparing a corrected text of the Saint's writings, he was to spare no effort in searching for every extant manuscript; accordingly he began long journeys through La Mancha and Andalusia, going over all the ground covered by St. John of the Cross in his travels and paying special attention to the places where he had lived for any considerable period. In those days, before the religious persecutions of the nineteenth century had destroyed and scattered books and manuscripts, the archives of the various religious houses were intact. P. Andr zs and his amanuensis were therefore able to copy and collate valuable manuscripts now lost to us and they at once began to restore the phrases and passages omitted from the editions. Unhappily, their work has disappeared and we can judge of it only at second hand; but it appears to have been in every way meritorious. So far as we can gather from the documents which have come down to us, it failed to pass the rigorous censorship of the Order. In other words, the censors, who were professional theologians, insisted upon making so many corrections that the Superiors, who shared the enlightened critical opinions of P. Andr zs, thought it better to postpone the publication of the edition indefinitely.

The failure of the project, however, to which P. Andr zs devoted so much patient labour, did not wholly destroy the fruits of his skill and perseverance. He was ordered to retire to his priory, where he spent the rest of his long life under the burden of a trial the magnitude of which any scholar or studiously minded reader can estimate. He did what he could in his seclusion to collect, arrange and recopy such notes of his work as he could recover from those to whom they had been submitted. His defence of this action to the Chapter-General is at once admirable in the tranquillity of its temper and pathetic in the eagerness and affection which it displays for the task that he has been forbidden to continue:

Inasmuch as I was ordered, some years ago . . . to prepare an exact edition of the works of our holy father, and afterwards was commanded to suspend my labours for just reasons which presented themselves to these our fathers and prevented its accomplishment at the time, I obeyed forthwith with the greatest submissiveness, but, as I found that I had a rich store of information which at some future time might contribute to the publication of a truly illustrious

---

<sup>56</sup>Quoted by P. Andr zs de la Encarnaci n (MS. 3,653, Previo 1).

and perfect edition, it seemed to me that I should not be running counter to the spirit of the Order if I gave it some serviceable form, so that I should not be embarrassed by seeing it in a disorderly condition if at some future date it should be proposed to carry into effect the original decisions of the Order.

With humility and submissiveness, therefore, I send to your Reverences these results of my private labours, not because it is in my mind that the work should be recommended, or that, if this is to be done, it should be at any particular time, for that I leave to the disposition of your Reverences and of God, but to the end that I may return to the Order that which belongs to it; for, since I was excused from religious observances for nearly nine years so that I might labour in this its own field, the Order cannot but have a right to the fruits of my labours, nor can I escape the obligation of delivering what I have discovered into its hand. . . .<sup>57</sup>

We cannot examine the full text of the interesting memorandum to the Censors which follows this humble exordium. One of their allegations had been that the credit of the Order would suffer if it became known that passages of the Saint's works had been suppressed by Carmelite editors. P. AndrŽs makes the sage reply: 'There is certainly the risk that this will become known if the edition is made; but there is also a risk that it will become known in any case. We must weigh the risks against each other and decide which proceeding will bring the Order into the greater discredit if one of them materializes.' He fortifies this argument with the declaration that the defects of the existing editions were common knowledge outside the Order as well as within it, and that, as manuscript copies of the Saint's works were also in the possession of many others than Carmelites, there was nothing to prevent a correct edition being made at any time. This must suffice as a proof that P. AndrŽs could be as acute as he was submissive.

Besides collecting this material, and leaving on record his opposition to the short-sighted decision of the Censors, P. AndrŽs prepared 'some *Disquisitions* on the writings of the Saint, which, if a more skilful hand should correct and improve their style, cannot but be well received.' Closely connected with the *Disquisitions* are the *Preludes* in which he glosses the Saint's writings. These studies, like the notes already described, have all been lost -- no doubt, together with many other documents from the archives of the Reform in Madrid, they disappeared during the pillaging of the religious houses in the early nineteenth century.

The little of P. AndrŽs' work that remains to us gives a clear picture of the efforts made by the Reform to bring out a worthy edition of St. John of the Cross's writings in the eighteenth century; it is manifestly insufficient, however, to take a modern editor far along the way. Nor, as we have seen, are his judgments by any means to be followed otherwise than with the greatest caution; he greatly exaggerates, too, the effect of the mutilations of earlier editors, no doubt in order to convince his superiors of the necessity for a new edition. The materials for a modern editor are to be found, not in the documents left by P. AndrŽs, but in such Carmelite archives as still exist, and in the National Library of Spain, to which many Carmelite treasures found their way at the beginning of the last century.

---

<sup>57</sup>MS. 3,653, Previo 1.

The work sent by P. Andr zs to his superiors was kept in the archives of the Discalced Carmelites, but no new edition was prepared till a hundred and fifty years later. In the nineteenth century such a task was made considerably more difficult by religious persecution; which resulted in the loss of many valuable manuscripts, some of which P. Andr zs must certainly have examined. For a time, too, the Orders were expelled from Spain, and, on their return, had neither the necessary freedom, nor the time or material means, for such undertakings. In the twenty-seventh volume of the well-known series of classics entitled *Biblioteca de Autores Espa oles* (1853) the works of St. John of the Cross were reprinted according to the 1703 edition, without its engravings, indices and commendations, and with a 'critical estimate' of the Saint by Pi y Margall, which has some literary value but in other respects fails entirely to do justice to its subject.

Neither the Madrid edition of 1872 nor the Barcelona edition of 1883 adds anything to our knowledge and it was not till the Toledo edition of 1912-14 that a new advance was made. This edition was the work of a young Carmelite friar, P. Gerardo de San Juan de la Cruz, who died soon after its completion. It aims, according to its title, which is certainly justified, at being 'the most correct and complete edition of all that have been published down to the present date.' If it was not as successful as might have been wished, this could perhaps hardly have been expected of a comparatively inexperienced editor confronted with so gigantic a task -- a man, too, who worked almost alone and was by temperament and predilection an investigator rather than a critic. Nevertheless, its introductions, footnotes, appended documents, and collection of apocryphal works of the Saint, as well as its text, were all considered worthy of extended study and the edition was rightly received with enthusiasm. Its principal merit will always lie in its having restored to their proper places, for the first time in a printed edition, many passages which had theretofore remained in manuscript.

We have been anxious that this new edition [Burgos, 1929-31] should represent a fresh advance in the task of establishing a definitive text of St. John of the Cross's writings. For this reason we have examined, together with two devoted assistants, every discoverable manuscript, with the result, as it seems to us, that both the form and the content of our author's works are as nearly as possible as he left them.

In no case have we followed any one manuscript exclusively, preferring to assess the value of each by a careful preliminary study and to consider each on its merits, which are described in the introduction to each of the individual works. Since our primary aim has been to present an accurate text, our footnotes will be found to be almost exclusively textual. The only edition which we cite, with the occasional exception of that of 1630, is the *princeps*, from which alone there is much to be learned. The Latin quotations from the Vulgate are not, of course, given except where they appear in the manuscripts, and, save for the occasional correction of a copyist's error, they are reproduced in exactly the form in which we have found them. Orthography and punctuation have had perforce to be modernized, since the manuscripts differ widely and we have so few autographs that nothing conclusive can be learned of the Saint's own practice.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup>[The last two paragraphs form P. Silverio's description of his own edition. The lines followed in the present translation have been described in the Translator's Preface.]



# ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL

## INTRODUCTION

AS will be seen from the biographical outline which we have given of the life of St. John of the Cross, this was the first of the Saint's treatises to be written; it was begun at El Calvario, and, after various intervals, due to the author's preoccupation with the business of government and the direction and care of souls, was completed at Granada.

The treatise presents a remarkable outline of Christian perfection from the point at which the soul first seeks to rise from the earth and soar upward towards union with God. It is a work which shows every sign of careful planning and great attention to detail, as an ascetic treatise it is noteworthy for its detailed psychological analysis; as a contribution to mystical theology, for the skill with which it treats the most complicated and delicate questions concerning the Mystic Way.

Both the great Carmelite reformers pay close attention to the early stages of the mystical life, beyond which many never pass, and both give the primacy to prayer as a means of attaining perfection. To St. Teresa prayer is the greatest of all blessings of this life, the channel through which all the favours of God pass to the soul, the beginning of every virtue and the plainly marked highroad which leads to the summit of Mount Carmel. She can hardly conceive of a person in full spiritual health whose life is not one of prayer. Her coadjutor in the Carmelite Reform writes in the same spirit. Prayer, for St. John of the Cross as for St. Teresa, is no mere exercise made up of petition and meditation, but a complete spiritual life which brings in its train all the virtues, increases all the soul's potentialities and may ultimately lead to 'deification' or transformation in God through love. It may be said that the exposition of the life of prayer, from its lowest stages to its highest, is the common aim of these two Saints, which each pursues and accomplishes in a peculiarly individual manner.

St. John of the Cross assumes his reader to be familiar with the rudiments of the spiritual life and therefore omits detailed description of the most elementary of the exercises incumbent upon all Christians. The plan of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* (which, properly speaking, embraces its sequel, the *Dark Night*) follows the lines of the poem with the latter title (p. 10). Into two stanzas of five lines each, St. John of the Cross has condensed all the instruction which he develops in this treatise. In order to reach the Union of Light, the soul must pass through the Dark Night -- that is to say, through a series of purifications, during which it is walking, as it were, through a tunnel of impenetrable obscurity and from which it emerges to bask in the sunshine of grace and to enjoy the Divine intimacy.

Through this obscurity the thread which guides the soul is that of 'emptiness' or 'negation.' Only by voiding ourselves of all that is not God can we attain to the possession of God, for two contraries cannot co-exist in one individual, and creature-love is darkness, while God is light, so that from any human heart one of the two cannot fail to drive out the other.<sup>59</sup>

Now the soul, according to the Saint's psychology, is made up of interior and exterior senses and of the faculties. All these must be free from creature impurities in

---

<sup>59</sup>*Ascent*, Bk. III, Chap. ii.

order to be prepared for Divine union. The necessary self-emptying may be accomplished in two ways: by our own efforts, with the habitual aid of grace, and by the action of God exclusively, in which the individual has no part whatsoever. Following this order, the Ascent is divided into two parts, which deal respectively with the 'Active' night and the 'Passive.' Each of these parts consists of several books. Since the soul must be purified in its entirety, the Active Night is logically divided into the Night of Sense and the Night of the Spirit; a similar division is observed in treating of the Passive Night. One book is devoted to the Active Night of Sense; two are needed for the Active Night of the Spirit. Unhappily, however, the treatise was never finished; not only was its author unable to take us out of the night into the day, as he certainly intended to do, but he has not even space to describe the Passive Night in all the fullness of its symbolism.

A brief glance at the outstanding parts of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* will give some idea of its nature. The first obstacle which the pilgrim soul encounters is the senses, upon which St. John of the Cross expends his analytical skill in Book I. Like any academic professor (and it will be recalled that he had undergone a complete university course at Salamanca), he outlines and defines his subject, goes over the necessary preliminary ground before expounding it, and treats it, in turn, under each of its natural divisions. He tells us, that is to say, what he understands by the 'dark night'; describes its causes and its stages; explains how necessary it is to union with God; enumerates the perils which beset the soul that enters it; and shows how all desires must be expelled, 'however small they be,' if the soul is to travel through it safely. Finally he gives a complete synthesis of the procedure that must be adopted by the pilgrim in relation to this part of his journey: the force of this is intensified by those striking maxims and distichs which make Chapter xiii of Book I so memorable.

The first thirteen chapters of the *Ascent* are perhaps the easiest to understand (though they are anything but easy to put into practice) in the entire works of St. John of the Cross. They are all a commentary on the very first line of the poem. The last two chapters of the first book glance at the remaining lines, rather than expound them, and the Saint takes us on at once to Book II, which expounds the second stanza and enters upon the Night of the Spirit.

Here the Saint treats of the proximate means to union with God -- namely, faith. He uses the same careful method of exposition, showing clearly how faith is to the soul as a dark night, and how, nevertheless, it is the safest of guides. A parenthetical chapter (v) attempts to give some idea of the nature of union, so that the reader may recognize from afar the goal to which he is proceeding. The author then goes on to describe how the three theological virtues -- faith, hope and charity -- must 'void and dispose for union' the three faculties of the soul -- understanding, memory and will.

He shows how narrow is the way that leads to life and how nothing that belongs to the understanding can guide the soul to union. His illustrations and arguments are far more complicated and subtle than are those of the first book, and give the reader some idea of his knowledge, not only of philosophy and theology, but also of individual souls. Without this last qualification he could never have written those penetrating chapters on the impediments to union -- above all, the passages on visions, locutions and revelations -- nor must we overlook his description (Chapter xiii) of the three signs that the soul is ready to pass from meditation to contemplation. It may be doubted if in its own field this second book has ever been surpassed. There is no mystic who gives a more powerful impression than St. John of the Cross of an absolute mastery of his subject. No mistiness, vagueness or indecision clouds his writing: he is as clear-cut and

definite as can be.

In his third book St. John of the Cross goes on to describe the obstacles to union which come from the memory and the will. Unlike St. Thomas, he considered the memory as a distinct and separate faculty of the soul. Having written, however, at such length of the understanding, he found it possible to treat more briefly of that other faculty, which is so closely related to it.<sup>60</sup> Fourteen chapters (ii-xv) describe the dark night to be traversed by the memory; thirty (xvi-xlv) the passage of the will, impelled by love.<sup>61</sup> The latter part is the more strikingly developed. Four passions -- joy, hope, sorrow and fear -- invade the will, and may either encompass the soul's perdition, or, if rightly directed, lead it to virtue and union. Once more St. John of the Cross employs his profound familiarity with the human soul to turn it away from peril and guide it into the path of safety. Much that he says, in dealing with passions so familiar to us all, is not only purely ascetic, but is even commonplace to the instructed Christian. Yet these are but parts of a greater whole.

Of particular interest, both intrinsically and as giving a picture of the Saint's own times, are the chapters on ceremonies and aids to devotion -- the use of rosaries, medals, pilgrimages, etc. It must be remembered, of course, that he spent most of his active life in the South of Spain, where exaggerations of all kinds, even to-day, are more frequent than in the more sober north. In any case there is less need, in this lukewarm age, to warn Christians against the abuse of these means of grace, and more need, perhaps, to urge them to employ aids that will stimulate and quicken their devotion.

In the seventeenth chapter of this third book, St. John of the Cross enumerates the 'six kinds of good' which can give rise to rejoicing and sets down his intention of treating each of them in turn. He carries out his purpose, but, on entering his last division, subdivides it at considerable length and subsequently breaks off with some brusqueness while dealing with one of these sub-heads, just as he is introducing another subject of particular interest historically -- namely, pulpit methods considered from the standpoint of the preacher. In all probability we shall never know what he had to say about the hearers of sermons, or what were his considered judgments on confessors and penitents -- though of these judgments he has left us examples elsewhere in this treatise, as well as in others.

We cannot estimate of how much the sudden curtailment of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel* has robbed us.<sup>62</sup> Orderly as was the mind of St. John of the Cross, he was easily carried away in his expositions, which are apt to be unequal. No one would have suspected, for example, that, after going into such length in treating the first line of his first stanza, he would make such short work of the remaining four. Nor can we disregard the significance of his warning that much of what he had written on the understanding was applicable also to the memory and the will. He may, therefore, have been nearer the end of his theme than is generally supposed. Yet it is equally possible that much more of his subtle analysis was in store for his readers. Any truncation, when the author is a St. John of the Cross, must be considered irreparable.

#### THE MANUSCRIPTS<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup>*Ascent*, Bk. III, Chap. iii, ¶ 1.

<sup>61</sup>Cf. *Ascent*, Bk. III, Chap. xvi, ¶¶ 1-2.

<sup>62</sup>[On the question of the curtailment of the *Ascent*, see Sobrino, pp. 159-66.]

<sup>63</sup>[On MSS. not described by P. Silverio, see *Ephemerides Carmeliticae*, Florence, 1950, IV, 95-148, and

Unfortunately there is no autograph of this treatise extant, though there are a number of early copies, some of which have been made with great care. Others, for various reasons, abbreviate the original considerably. The MSS. belonging to both classes will be enumerated.

*Alba de Tormes.* The Discalced Carmelite priory of Alba de Tormes has a codex which contains the four principal treatises of St. John of the Cross (*Ascent*, *Dark Night*, *Spiritual Canticle* and *Living Flame*). This codex belonged from a very early date (perhaps from a date not much later than that of the Saint's death) to the family of the Duke of Alba, which was greatly devoted to the Discalced Carmelite Reform and to St. Teresa, its foundress. It remained in the family until the beginning of the eighteenth century, when it came into the hands of a learned Carmelite, Fray Alonso de la Madre de Dios, who presented it to the Alba monastery on April 15, 1705. The details of this history are given by Fray Alonso himself in a note bearing this date.

For over half a century the MS. was believed to be an autograph, partly, no doubt, on account of its luxurious binding and the respect paid to the noble house whence it came. In February 1761, however, it was examined carefully by P. Manuel de Santa Mar'a, who, by his Superiors' orders, was assisting P. AndrŽs de la Encarnaci—n in his search for, and study of, manuscripts of the Saint's writings. P. Manuel soon discovered that the opinion commonly held was erroneous -- greatly, it would seem, to the disillusionment of his contemporaries. Among the various reasons which he gives in a statement supporting his conclusions is that in two places the author is described as 'santo' -- a proof not only that the MS. is not an autograph but also that the copyist had no intention of representing it as such.

Although this copy is carefully made and richly bound -- which suggests that it was a gift from the Reform to the house of Alba -- it contains many errors, of a kind which indicate that the copyist, well educated though he was, knew little of ascetic or mystical theology. A number of omissions, especially towards the end of the book, give the impression that the copy was finished with haste and not compared with the original on its completion. There is no reason, however, to suppose that the errors and omissions are ever intentional; indeed, they are of such a kind as to suggest that the copyist had not the skill necessary for successful adulteration.

MS. 6,624. This copy, like the next four, is in N.L.M. [National Library of Spain, Madrid], and contains the same works as that of Alba de Tormes. It was made in 1755, under the direction of P. AndrŽs de la Encarnaci—n, from a manuscript, now lost, which was venerated by the Benedictines of Burgos: this information is found at the end of the volume. P. AndrŽs had evidently a good opinion of the Burgos MS., as he placed this copy in the archives of the Discalced Reform, whence it passed to the National Library early in the nineteenth century.

As far as the *Ascent* is concerned, this MS. is very similar to that of Alba. With a few notable exceptions, such as the omission of the second half of Book I, Chapter iv, the errors and omissions are so similar as to suggest a definite relationship, if not a common source.

MS. 13,498. This MS., which gives us the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night*, also came from the Archives of the Reform and is now in the National Library. The handwriting

---

in particular p. 103, n. 9. As the variants and annotations in these MSS. will be of interest only to specialists, and few of them can be reproduced in a translation, those who wish to study them are referred to that article.]

might be as early as the end of the sixteenth century. The author did not attempt to make a literal transcription of the *Ascent*, but summarized where he thought advisable, reducing the number of chapters and abbreviating many of them -- this last not so much by the method of paraphrase as by the free omission of phrases and sentences.

MS. 2,201. This, as far as the *Ascent* is concerned, is an almost literal transcription of the last MS., in a seventeenth-century hand; it was bound in the eighteenth century, when a number of other treatises were added to it, together with some poems by St. John of the Cross and others. The variants as between this MS. and 13,498 are numerous, but of small importance, and seem mainly to have been due to carelessness.

MS. 18,160. This dates from the end of the sixteenth century and contains the four treatises named above, copied in different hands and evidently intended to form one volume. Only the first four chapters of the *Ascent* are given, together with the title and the first three lines of the fifth chapter. The transcription is poorly done.

MS. 13,507. An unimportant copy, containing only a few odd chapters of the *Ascent* and others from the remaining works of St. John of the Cross and other writers.

*Pamplona*. A codex in an excellent state of preservation is venerated by the Discalced Carmelite nuns of Pamplona. It was copied, at the end of the sixteenth century, by a Barcelona Carmelite, M. Magdalena de la Asunci—n, and contains a short summary of the four treatises enumerated above, various poems by St. John of the Cross and some miscellaneous writings. The *Ascent* is abbreviated to the same extent as in 13,498 and 2,201 and by the same methods; many chapters, too, are omitted in their entirety.

*Alcaudete*. This MS., which contains the *Ascent* only, was copied by St. John of the Cross's close friend and companion, P. Juan Evangelista, as a comparison with manuscripts (N.L.M., 12,738) written in his well-known and very distinctive hand, puts beyond all doubt. P. Juan, who took the habit of the Reform at Christmas 1582, knew the Saint before this date; was professed by him at Granada in 1583; accompanied him on many of his journeys; saw him write most of his books; and, as his close friend and confessor, was consulted repeatedly by his biographers.<sup>64</sup> It is natural that he should also have acted as the Saint's copyist, and, in the absence of autographs, we should expect no manuscripts to be more trustworthy than copies made by him. Examination of this MS. shows that it is in fact highly reliable. It corrects none of those unwieldy periods in which the Saint's work abounds, and which the *editio princeps* often thought well to amend, nor, like the early editions and even some manuscripts, does it omit whole paragraphs and substitute others for them. Further, as this copy was being made solely for the use of the Order, no passages are omitted or altered in it because they might be erroneously interpreted as illuministic. It is true that P. Juan Evangelista is not, from the technical standpoint, a perfect copyist, but, frequently as are his slips, they are always easy to recognize.

The Alcaudete MS. was found in the Carmelite priory in that town by P. Andr̃s de la Encarnaci—n, who first made use of it for his edition. When the priory was abandoned during the religious persecutions of the early nineteenth century, the MS. was lost. Nearly a hundred years passed before it was re-discovered by P. Silverio de Santa Teresa in a second-hand bookshop [and forms a most important contribution to that scholar's edition, which normally follows it]. It bears many signs of frequent use;

---

<sup>64</sup>[H, *sub* Juan Evangelista (2)]

eleven folios are missing from the body of the MS. (corresponding approximately to Book III, Chapters xxii to xxvi) and several more from its conclusion.

In the footnotes to the *Ascent*, the following abbreviations are used:

A = MS. of the Discalced Carmelite Friars of Alba.

Alc. = Alcaudete MS.

B = MS. of the Benedictines of Burgos.

C = N.L.M., MS. 13,498.

D = N.L.M., MS. 2,201.

P = MS. of the Discalced Carmelite Nuns of Pamplona.

E.p. = *Editio princeps* (Alcalá, 1618).

Other editions or manuscripts cited are referred to without abbreviation.

## ASCENT OF MOUNT CARMEL

*Treats of how the soul may prepare itself in order to attain in a short time to Divine union. Gives very profitable counsels and instruction, both to beginners and to proficients, that they may know how to disencumber themselves of all that is temporal and not to encumber themselves with the spiritual, and to remain in complete detachment and liberty of spirit, as is necessary for Divine union.*

### ARGUMENT

ALL the doctrine whereof I intend to treat in this *Ascent of Mount Carmel* is included in the following stanzas, and in them is also described the manner of ascending to the summit of the Mount, which is the high estate of perfection which we here call union of the soul with God. And because I must continually base upon them that which I shall say, I have desired to set them down here together, to the end that all the substance of that which is to be written may be seen and comprehended together; although it will be fitting to set down each stanza separately before expounding it, and likewise the lines of each stanza, according as the matter and the exposition require. The poem, then, runs as follows:<sup>65</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup>[*Lit.*: 'It says, then, thus.']

## STANZAS<sup>66</sup>

Wherein the soul sings of the happy chance which it had in passing through the dark night of faith, in detachment and purgation of itself, to union with the Beloved.

1. On a dark night, Kindled<sup>67</sup> in love with yearnings -- oh, happy chance! --  
I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest.<sup>68</sup>
2. In darkness and secure, By the secret ladder, disguised -- oh, happy chance! --  
In darkness and in concealment, My house being now at rest.
3. In the happy night, In secret, when none saw me,  
Nor I beheld aught, Without light or guide, save that which burned in my heart.
4. This light guided me More surely than the light of noonday,  
To the place where he (well I knew who!) was awaiting me -- A place where none appeared.
5. Oh, night that guided me, Oh, night more lovely than the dawn,  
Oh, night that joined Beloved with lover, Lover transformed in the Beloved!
6. Upon my flowery breast, Kept wholly for himself alone,  
There he stayed sleeping, and I caressed him, And the fanning of the cedars made a breeze.
7. The breeze blew from the turret As I parted his locks;  
With his gentle hand he wounded my neck And caused all my senses to be suspended.
8. I remained, lost in oblivion;<sup>69</sup> My face I reclined on the Beloved.  
All ceased and I abandoned myself, Leaving my cares forgotten among the lilies.

---

<sup>66</sup>For a verse translation in the metre of the original, see Vol. II.

<sup>67</sup>[The adjectives are feminine throughout.]

<sup>68</sup>[The word translated 'at rest' is a past participle: more literally, 'stilled'.]

<sup>69</sup>[*Lit.*: 'I remained and forgot'.]



## PROLOGUE

IN order to expound and describe this dark night, through which the soul passes in order to attain to the Divine light of the perfect union of the love of God, as far as is possible in this life, it would be necessary to have illumination of knowledge and experience other and far greater than mine; for this darkness and these trials, both spiritual and temporal, through which happy souls are wont to pass in order to be able to attain to this high estate of perfection, are so numerous and so profound that neither does human knowledge suffice for the understanding of them, nor experience for the description of them; for only he that passes this way can understand it, and even he cannot describe it.

2. Therefore, in order to say a little about this dark night, I shall trust neither to experience nor to knowledge, since both may fail and deceive; but, while not omitting to make such use as I can of these two things, I shall avail myself, in all that, with the Divine favour, I have to say, or at the least, in that which is most important and dark to the understanding, of Divine Scripture; for, if we guide ourselves by this, we shall be unable to stray, since He Who speaks therein is the Holy Spirit. And if aught I stray, whether through my imperfect understanding of that which is said in it or of matters uncollected with it, it is not my intention to depart from the sound sense and doctrine of our Holy Mother the Catholic Church; for in such a case I submit and resign myself wholly, not only to her command, but to whatever better judgment she may pronounce concerning it.

3. To this end I have been moved, not by any possibility that I see in myself of accomplishing so arduous a task, but by the confidence which I have in the Lord that He will help me to say something to relieve the great necessity which is experienced by many souls, who, when they set out upon the road of virtue, and Our Lord desires to bring them into this dark night that they may pass through it to Divine union, make no progress. At times this is because they have no desire to enter it or to allow themselves to be led into it; at other times, because they understand not themselves and lack competent and alert directors<sup>70</sup> who will guide them to the summit. And so it is sad to see many souls to whom God gives both aptitude and favour with which to make progress (and who, if they would take courage, could attain to this high estate), remaining in an elementary stage<sup>71</sup> of communion with God, for want of will, or knowledge, or because there is none who will lead them in the right path or teach them how to get away from these beginnings. And at length, although Our Lord grants them such favour as to make them to go onward without this hindrance or that, they arrive at their goal very much later, and with greater labour, yet with less merit, because they have not conformed themselves to God, and allowed themselves to be brought freely into the pure and sure road of union. For, although it is true that God is leading them, and that He can lead them without their own help, they will not allow themselves to be led; and thus they make less progress, because they resist Him Who is leading them, and they have less merit, because they apply not their will, and on this account they suffer more. For these are souls who, instead of committing themselves to God and making use of His help, rather hinder God by the indiscretion of their actions or by their

---

<sup>70</sup>[*Lit.* 'and wideawake guides.']

<sup>71</sup>[*Lit.*, 'a low manner.']

resistance; like children who, when their mothers desire to carry them in their arms, start stamping and crying, and insist upon being allowed to walk, with the result that they can make no progress; and, if they advance at all, it is only at the pace of a child.

4. Wherefore, to the end that all, whether beginners or proficients, may know how to commit themselves to God's guidance, when His Majesty desires to lead them onward, we shall give instruction and counsel, by His help, so that they may be able to understand His will, or, at the least, allow Him to lead them. For some confessors and spiritual fathers, having no light and experience concerning these roads, are wont to hinder and harm such souls rather than to help them on the road; they are like the builders of Babel, who, when told to furnish suitable material, gave and applied other very different material, because they understood not the language, and thus nothing was done. Wherefore, it is a difficult and troublesome thing at such seasons for a soul not to understand itself or to find none who understands it. For it will come to pass that God will lead the soul by a most lofty path of dark contemplation and aridity, wherein it seems to be lost, and, being thus full of darkness and trials, constraints and temptations, will meet one who will speak to it like Job's comforters, and say that it is suffering from melancholy, or low spirits, or a morbid disposition, or that it may have some hidden sin, and that it is for this reason that God has forsaken it. Such comforters are wont to declare immediately that that soul must have been very evil, since such things as these are befalling it.

5. And there will likewise be those who tell the soul to retrace its steps, since it is finding no pleasure or consolation in the things of God as it did aforetime. And in this way they double the poor soul's trials; for it may well be that the greatest affliction which it is feeling is that of the knowledge of its own miseries, thinking that it sees itself, more clearly than daylight, to be full of evils and sins, for God gives it that light of knowledge in that night of contemplation, as we shall presently show. And, when the soul finds someone whose opinion agrees with its own, and who says that these things must be due to its own fault, its affliction and trouble increase infinitely and are wont to become more grievous than death. And, not content with this, such confessors, thinking that these things proceed from sin, make these souls go over their lives and cause them to make many general confessions, and crucify them afresh; not understanding that this may quite well not be the time for any of such things, and that their penitents should be left in the state of purgation which God gives them, and be comforted and encouraged to desire it until God be pleased to dispose otherwise; for until that time, no matter what the souls themselves may do and their confessors may say, there is no remedy for them.

6. This, with the Divine favour, we shall consider hereafter, and also how the soul should conduct itself at such a time, and how the confessor must treat it, and what signs there will be whereby it may be known if this is the purgation of the soul; and, in such case, whether it be of sense or of spirit (which is the dark night whereof we speak), and how it may be known if it be melancholy or some other imperfection with respect to sense or to spirit. For there may be some souls who will think, or whose confessors will think, that God is leading them along this road of the dark night of spiritual purgation, whereas they may possibly be suffering only from some of the imperfections aforementioned. And, again, there are many souls who think that they have no aptitude for prayer, when they have very much; and there are others who think that they have much when they have hardly any.

7. There are other souls who labour and weary themselves to a piteous extent,

and yet go backward, seeking profit in that which is not profitable, but is rather a hindrance; and there are still others who, by remaining at rest and in quietness, continue to make great progress. There are others who are hindered and disturbed and make no progress, because of the very consolations and favours that God is granting them in order that they may make progress. And there are many other things on this road that befall those who follow it, both joys and afflictions and hopes and griefs: some proceeding from the spirit of perfection and others from imperfection. Of all these, with the Divine favour, we shall endeavour to say something, so that each soul who reads this may be able to see something of the road that he ought to follow, if he aspire to attain to the summit of this Mount.

8. And, since this introduction relates to the dark night through which the soul must go to God, let not the reader marvel if it seem to him somewhat dark also. This, I believe, will be so at the beginning when he begins to read; but, as he passes on, he will find himself understanding the first part better, since one part will explain another. And then, if he read it a second time, I believe it will seem clearer to him and the instruction will appear sounder. And if any persons find themselves disagreeing with this instruction, it will be due to my ignorance and poor style; for in itself the matter is good and of the first importance. But I think that, even were it written in a more excellent and perfect manner than it is, only the minority would profit by it, for we shall not here set down things that are very moral and delectable<sup>72</sup> for all spiritual persons who desire to travel toward God by pleasant and delectable ways, but solid and substantial instruction, as well suited to one kind of person as to another, if they desire to pass to the detachment of spirit which is here treated.

9. Nor is my principal intent to address all, but rather certain persons of our sacred Order of Mount Carmel of the primitive observance, both friars and nuns -- since they have desired me to do so -- to whom God is granting the favour of setting them on the road to this Mount; who, as they are already detached from the temporal things of this world, will better understand the instruction concerning detachment of spirit.

---

<sup>72</sup>Needless to say, the Saint does not here mean that he will not write in conformity with moral standards -- no writer is more particular in this respect -- nor that he will deal with no delectable matters at all, but rather that he will go to the very roots of spiritual teaching and expound the 'solid and substantial instruction,' which not only forms its basis but also leads the soul toward the most intimate union with God in love.

## BOOK THE FIRST

*Wherein is described the nature of dark night and how necessary it is to pass through it to Divine union; and in particular this book describes the dark night of sense, and desire, and the evils which these work in the soul.*<sup>73</sup>

### CHAPTER I

*Sets down the first stanza. Describes two different nights through which spiritual persons pass, according to the two parts of man, the lower and the higher. Expounds the stanza which follows.*

#### STANZA THE FIRST

**On a dark night, Kindled in love with yearnings -- oh, happy chance! --  
I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest.**

IN this first stanzas the soul sings of the happy fortune and chance which it experienced in going forth from all things that are without, and from the desires<sup>74</sup> and imperfections that are in the sensual<sup>75</sup> part of man because of the disordered state of his reason. For the understanding of this it must be known that, for a soul to attain to the state of perfection, it has ordinarily first to pass through two principal kinds of night, which spiritual persons call purgations or purifications of the soul; and here we call them nights, for in both of them the soul journeys, as it were, by night, in darkness.

2. The first night or purgation is of the sensual part of the soul, which is treated in the present stanza, and will be treated in the first part of this book. And the second is of the spiritual part; of this speaks the second stanza, which follows; and of this we shall treat likewise, in the second and the third part,<sup>76</sup> with respect to the activity of the soul; and in the fourth part, with respect to its passivity.

3. And this first night pertains to beginners, occurring at the time when God begins to bring them into the state of contemplation; in this night the spirit likewise has a part, as we shall say in due course. And the second night, or purification, pertains to

---

<sup>73</sup>The Codices give neither title nor sub-title: both were inserted in e.p. ['Desire' is to be taken as the direct object of 'describes'; 'these' refers to 'sense' and 'desire,' not to the dark night.]

<sup>74</sup>[*Lit.*, 'appetites,' but this word is uniformly translated 'desires,' as the Spanish context frequently will not admit the use of the stronger word in English.]

<sup>75</sup>[The word translated 'sensual' is sometimes *sensual*, and sometimes, as here, *sensitivo*. The meaning in either case is simply 'of sense.']

<sup>76</sup>So Alc. The other authorities read: 'and of this we shall treat likewise, in the second part with respect to the activity [of the soul] [*these last three words are not contained in the Spanish of any authority*], and in the third and the fourth part with respect to its passivity.' E.p. follows this division. Alc., however, seems to correspond more closely with the Saint's intentions; for he did not divide each of his 'books' into 'parts' and appears therefore to indicate by 'part' what we know as 'book.' Now Book I is in fact devoted to the active purgation of sense, as are Books II and III to the active purgation of the spirit. For the 'fourth book,' see General Introduction, IV above.

those who are already proficient, occurring at the time when God desires to bring them to the state of union with God. And this latter night is a more obscure and dark and terrible purgation, as we shall say afterwards.

4. Briefly, then, the soul means by this stanza that it went forth (being led by God) for love of Him alone, enkindled in love of Him, upon a dark night, which is the privation and purgation of all its sensual desires, with respect to all outward things of the world and to those which were delectable to its flesh, and likewise with respect to the desires of its will. This all comes to pass in this purgation of sense; for which cause the soul says that it went forth while its house was still at rest;<sup>77</sup> which house is its sensual part, the desires being at rest and asleep in it, as it is to them.<sup>78</sup> For there is no going forth from the pains and afflictions of the secret places of the desires until these be mortified and put to sleep. And this, the soul says, was a happy chance for it -- namely, its going forth without being observed: that is, without any desire of its flesh or any other thing being able to hinder it. And likewise, because it went out by night -- which signifies the privation of all these things wrought in it by God, which privation was night for it.

5. And it was a happy chance that God should lead it into this night, from which there came to it so much good; for of itself the soul would not have succeeded in entering therein, because no man of himself can succeed in voiding himself of all his desires in order to come to God.

6. This is, in brief, the exposition of the stanza; and we shall now have to go through it, line by line, setting down one line after another, and expounding that which pertains to our purpose. And the same method is followed in the other stanzas, as I said in the Prologue<sup>79</sup> -- namely, that each stanza will be set down and expounded, and afterwards each line.

## CHAPTER II

*Explains the nature of this dark night through which the soul says that it has passed on the road to union.*

### On A Dark Night

WE may say that there are three reasons for which this journey<sup>80</sup> made by the soul to union with God is called night. The first has to do with the point from which the soul goes forth, for it has gradually to deprive itself of desire for all the worldly things which it possessed, by denying them to itself;<sup>81</sup> the which denial and deprivation are, as it were, night to all the senses of man. The second reason has to do with the mean,<sup>82</sup> or the road along which the soul must travel to this union -- that is, faith, which is likewise as dark as night to the understanding. The third has to do with the point to which it travels - namely, God, Who, equally, is dark night to the soul in this life. These three nights

---

<sup>77</sup>[The word translated 'at rest' is a past participle: more literally, 'stilled.']

<sup>78</sup>[*Lit.*, 'and it in them.' This 'it' means the soul; the preceding 'it,' the house.]

<sup>79</sup>i.e., in the 'Argument.'

<sup>80</sup>[More exactly, this 'passage' or 'transition' (*transito*).]

<sup>81</sup>[*Lit.*, 'in negation of them.']

<sup>82</sup>[By 'the mean' is meant the middle, or main part, of the journey.]

must pass through the soul -- or, rather, the soul must pass through them -- in order that it may come to Divine union with God.

2. In the book of the holy Tobias these three kinds of night were shadowed forth by the three nights which, as the angel commanded, were to pass ere the youth Tobias should be united with his bride. In the first he commanded him to burn the heart of the fish in the fire, which signifies the heart that is affectioned to, and set upon, the things of the world; which, in order that one may begin to journey toward God, must be burned and purified from all that is creature, in the fire of the love of God. And in this purgation the devil flees away, for he has power over the soul only when it is attached to things corporeal and temporal.

3. On the second night the angel told him that he would be admitted into the company of the holy patriarchs, who are the fathers of the faith. For, passing through the first night, which is self-privation of all objects of sense, the soul at once enters into the second night, and abides alone in faith to the exclusion, not of charity, but of other knowledge acquired by the understanding, as we shall say hereafter, which is a thing that pertains not to sense.

4. On the third night the angel told him that he would obtain a blessing, which is God; Who, by means of the second night, which is faith, continually communicates Himself to the soul in such a secret and intimate manner that He becomes another night to the soul, inasmuch as this said communication is far darker than those others, as we shall say presently. And, when this third night is past, which is the complete accomplishment of the communication of God in the spirit, which is ordinarily wrought in great darkness of the soul, there then follows its union with the Bride, which is the Wisdom of God. Even so the angel said likewise to Tobias that, when the third night was past, he should be united with his bride in the fear of the Lord; for, when this fear of God is perfect, love is perfect, and this comes to pass when the transformation of the soul is wrought through its love.

5. These three parts of the night are all one night; but, after the manner of night, it has three parts. For the first part, which is that of sense, is comparable to the beginning of night, the point at which things begin to fade from sight. And the second part, which is faith, is comparable to midnight, which is total darkness. And the third part is like the close of night, which is God, the which part is now near to the light of day. And, that we may understand this the better, we shall treat of each of these reasons separately as we proceed.

### CHAPTER III

*Speaks of the first cause of this night, which is that of the privation of the desire in all things, and gives the reason for which it is called night.*

WE here describe as night the privation of every kind of pleasure which belongs to the desire; for, even as night is naught but the privation of light, and, consequently, of all objects that can be seen by means of light, whereby the visual faculty remains unoccupied<sup>83</sup> and in darkness, even so likewise the mortification of desire may be called night to the soul. For, when the soul is deprived of the pleasure of its desire in all

---

<sup>83</sup>[*Lit.*, 'without anything (sc. to do).']

things, it remains, as it were, unoccupied and in darkness. For even as the visual faculty, by means of light, is nourished and fed by objects which can be seen, and which, when the light is quenched, are not seen, even so, by means of the desire, the soul is nourished and fed by all things wherein it can take pleasure according to its faculties; and, when this also is quenched, or rather, mortified, the soul ceases to feed upon the pleasure of all things, and thus, with respect to its desire, it remains unoccupied and in darkness.

2. Let us take an example from each of the faculties. When the soul deprives its desire of the pleasure of all that can delight the sense of hearing, the soul remains unoccupied and in darkness with respect to this faculty. And, when it deprives itself of the pleasure of all that can please the sense of sight, it remains unoccupied and in darkness with respect to this faculty also. And, when it deprives itself of the pleasure of all the sweetness of perfumes which can give it pleasure through the sense of smell, it remains equally unoccupied and in darkness according to this faculty. And, if it also denies itself the pleasure of all food that can satisfy the palate, the soul likewise remains unoccupied and in darkness. And finally, when the soul mortifies itself with respect to all the delights and pleasures that it can receive from the sense of touch, it remains, in the same way, unoccupied and in darkness with respect to this faculty. So that the soul that has denied and thrust away from itself the pleasures which come from all these things, and has mortified its desire with respect to them, may be said to be, as it were, in the darkness of night, which is naught else than an emptiness within itself of all things.

3. The reason for this is that, as the philosophers say, the soul, as soon as God infuses it into the body, is like a smooth, blank board<sup>84</sup> upon which nothing is painted; and, save for that which it experiences through the senses, nothing is communicated to it, in the course of nature, from any other source. And thus, for as long as it is in the body, it is like one who is in a dark prison and who knows nothing, save what he is able to see through the windows of the said prison; and, if he saw nothing through them, he would see nothing in any other way. And thus the soul, save for that which is communicated to it through the senses, which are the windows of its prison, could acquire nothing, in the course of nature, in any other way.

4. Wherefore, if the soul rejects and denies that which it can receive through the senses, we can quite well say that it remains, as it were, in darkness and empty; since, as appears from what has been said, no light can enter it, in the course of nature, by any other means of illumination than those aforementioned. For, although it is true that the soul cannot help hearing and seeing and smelling and tasting and touching, this is of no greater import, nor, if the soul denies and rejects the object, is it hindered more than if it saw it not, heard it not, etc. Just so a man who desires to shut his eyes will remain in darkness, like the blind man who has not the faculty of sight. And to this purpose David says these words: *Pauper sum ego, et in laboribus a indenture mea*.<sup>85</sup> Which signifies: I am poor and in labours from my youth. He calls himself poor, although it is clear that he was rich, because his will was not set upon riches, and thus it was as though he were really poor. But if he had not been really poor and had not been so in his will, he would not have been truly poor, for his soul, as far as its desire was concerned, would have been rich and replete. For that reason we call this detachment night to the soul, for we are not treating here of the lack of things, since this implies no

---

<sup>84</sup>['Blank board': Sp., *tabla rasa*; Lat., *tabula rasa*.]

<sup>85</sup>Psalms lxxxvii, 16 [A.V. lxxxviii, 15].

detachment on the part of the soul if it has a desire for them; but we are treating of the detachment from them of the taste and desire, for it is this that leaves the soul free and void of them, although it may have them; for it is not the things of this world that either occupy the soul or cause it harm, since they enter it not, but rather the will and desire for them, for it is these that dwell within it.

5. This first kind of night, as we shall say hereafter, belongs to the soul according to its sensual part, which is one of the two parts, whereof we spoke above, through which the soul must pass in order to attain to union.

6. Let us now say how meet it is for the soul to go forth from its house into this dark night of sense, in order to travel to union with God.

## CHAPTER IV

*Wherein is declared how necessary it is for the soul truly to pass through this dark night of sense, which is mortification of desire, in order that it may journey to union with God.*

THE reason for which it is necessary for the soul, in order to attain to Divine union with God, to pass through this dark night of mortification of the desires and denial of pleasures in all things, is because all the affections which it has for creatures are pure darkness in the eyes of God, and, when the soul is clothed in these affections, it has no capacity for being enlightened and possessed by the pure and simple light of God, if it first cast them not from it; for light cannot agree with darkness; since, as Saint John says: *Tenebroe eam non comprehenderunt*.<sup>86</sup> That is: The darkness could not receive the light.

2. The reason is that two contraries (even as philosophy teaches us) cannot coexist in one person; and that darkness, which is affection set upon the creatures, and light, which is God, are contrary to each other, and have no likeness or accord between one another, even as Saint Paul taught the Corinthians, saying: *Quoe conventio luci ad tenebras?*<sup>87</sup> That is to say: What communion can there be between light and darkness? Hence it is that the light of Divine union cannot dwell in the soul if these affections first flee not away from it.

3. In order that we may the better prove what has been said, it must be known that the affection and attachment which the soul has for creatures renders the soul like to these creatures; and, the greater is its affection, the closer is the equality and likeness between them; for love creates a likeness between that which loves and that which is loved. For which reason David, speaking of those who set their affections upon idols, said thus: *Similes illis fiant qui faciunt ea: et omnes qui confidunt in eis*.<sup>88</sup> Which signifies: Let them that set their heart upon them be like to them. And thus, he that loves a creature becomes as low as that creature, and, in some ways, lower; for love not only makes the lover equal to the object of his love, but even subjects him to it. Hence in the same way it comes to pass that the soul that loves anything else becomes incapable of pure union with God and transformation in Him. For the low estate of the creature is much less capable of union with the high estate of the Creator than is darkness with

---

<sup>86</sup>St. John i, 5.

<sup>87</sup>2 Corinthians vi, 14.

<sup>88</sup>Psalms cxiv, 9 [A.V. cxv, 8].



light. For all things of earth and heaven, compared with God, are nothing, as Jeremias says in these words: *Aspexi terram, et ecce vacua erat, et nihil; et coelos, et non erat lux in eis.*<sup>89</sup> 'I beheld the earth,' he says, 'and it was void, and it was nothing; and the heavens, and saw that they had no light.' In saying that he beheld the earth void, he means that all its creatures were nothing, and that the earth was nothing likewise. And, in saying that he beheld the heavens and saw no light in them, he says that all the luminaries of heaven, compared with God, are pure darkness. So that in this way all the creatures are nothing; and their affections, we may say, are less than nothing, since they are an impediment to transformation in God and the privation thereof, even as darkness is not only nothing, but less than nothing, since it is privation of light. And even as he that is in darkness comprehends not the light, so the soul that sets its affection upon creatures will be unable to comprehend God; and, until it be purged, it will neither be able to possess Him here below, through pure transformation of love, nor yonder in clear vision. And, for greater clarity, we will now speak in greater detail.

4. All the being of creation, then, compared with the infinite Being of God, is nothing. And therefore the soul that sets its affection upon the being of creation is likewise nothing in the eyes of God, and less than nothing; for, as we have said, love makes equality and similitude, and even sets the lover below the object of his love. And therefore such a soul will in no wise be able to attain to union with the infinite Being of God; for that which is not can have no communion with that which is. And, coming down in detail to some examples, all the beauty of the creatures, compared with the infinite beauty of God, is the height of deformity<sup>90</sup> even as Solomon says in the Proverbs: *Fallax gratia, et vana est pulchritudo.*<sup>91</sup> 'Favour is deceitful and beauty is vain.' And thus the soul that is affectioned to the beauty of any creature is the height of deformity in the eyes of God. And therefore this soul that is deformed will be unable to become transformed in beauty, which is God, since deformity cannot attain to beauty; and all the grace and beauty of the creatures, compared with the grace of God, is the height of misery<sup>92</sup> and of uncomeliness. Wherefore the soul that is ravished by the graces and beauties of the creatures has only supreme<sup>93</sup> misery and unattractiveness in the eyes of God; and thus it cannot be capable of the infinite grace and loveliness of God; for that which has no grace is far removed from that which is infinitely gracious; and all the goodness of the creatures of the world, in comparison with the infinite goodness of God, may be described as wickedness. 'For there is naught good, save only God.'<sup>94</sup> And therefore the soul that sets its heart upon the good things of the world is supremely evil in the eyes of God. And, even as wickedness comprehends not goodness, even so such a soul cannot be united with God, Who is supreme goodness.

5. All the wisdom of the world and all human ability, compared with the infinite wisdom of God, are pure and supreme ignorance, even as Saint Paul writes *ad*

---

<sup>89</sup>Jeremias iv, 23.

<sup>90</sup>[The words often translated 'deformity,' 'deformed,' or 'vileness,' 'vile,' are the ordinary contraries of 'beauty,' 'beautiful,' and might be rendered, more literally but less elegantly, 'ugliness,' 'ugly'.]

<sup>91</sup>Proverbs xxxi, 30.

<sup>92</sup>[For 'grace . . . misery' the Spanish has *gracia . . . desgracia*. The latter word, however, does not, as might be supposed, correspond to English 'disgrace'.]

<sup>93</sup>E.p. omits 'supreme'; the Spanish word [having a more literally superlative force than the English] can hardly be applied, save in a restricted sense, to what is finite.

<sup>94</sup>St. Luke xviii, 19.

*Corinthios*, saying: *Sapientia hujus mundi stultitia est apud Deum*.<sup>95</sup> 'The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.' Wherefore any soul that makes account of all its knowledge and ability in order to come to union with the wisdom of God is supremely ignorant in the eyes of God and will remain far removed from that wisdom; for ignorance knows not what wisdom is, even as Saint Paul says that this wisdom seems foolishness to God; since, in the eyes of God, those who consider themselves to be persons with a certain amount of knowledge are very ignorant, so that the Apostle, writing to the Romans, says of them: *Dicentes enim se esse sapientes, stulti facti sunt*. That is: Professing themselves to be wise, they became foolish.<sup>96</sup> And those alone acquire wisdom of God who are like ignorant children, and, laying aside their knowledge, walk in His service with love. This manner of wisdom Saint Paul taught likewise *ad Corinthios*: *Si quis videtur inter vos sapiens esse in hoc saeculo, stultus fiat ut sit sapiens. Sapientia enim hujus mundi stultitia est apud Deum*.<sup>97</sup> That is: If any man among you seem to be wise, let him become ignorant that he may be wise; for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. So that, in order to come to union with the wisdom of God, the soul has to proceed rather by unknowing than by knowing; and all the dominion and liberty of the world, compared with the liberty and dominion of the Spirit of God, is the most abject<sup>98</sup> slavery, affliction and captivity.

6. Wherefore the soul that is enamoured of prelacy,<sup>99</sup> or of any other such office, and longs for liberty of desire, is considered and treated, in the sight of God, not as a son, but as a base slave and captive, since it has not been willing to accept His holy doctrine, wherein He teaches us that whoso would be greater must be less, and whoso would be less must be greater. And therefore such a soul will be unable to attain to that true liberty of spirit which is attained in His Divine union. For slavery can have no part with liberty; and liberty cannot dwell in a heart that is subject to desires, for this is the heart of a slave; but it dwells in the free man, because he has the heart of a son. It was for this cause that Sara bade her husband Abraham cast out the bondwoman and her son, saying that the son of the bondwoman should not be heir with the son of the free woman.<sup>100</sup>

7. And all the delights and pleasures of the will in all the things of the world, in comparison with all those delights which are God, are supreme affliction, torment and bitterness. And thus he that sets his heart upon them is considered, in the sight of God, as worthy of supreme affliction, torment and bitterness; and thus he will be unable to attain to the delights of the embrace of union with God, since he is worthy of affliction and bitterness. All the wealth and glory of all creation, in comparison with the wealth which is God, is supreme poverty and wretchedness. Thus the soul that loves and possesses creature wealth is supremely poor and wretched in the sight of God, and for that reason will be unable to attain to that wealth and glory which is the state of transformation in God; for that which is miserable and poor is supremely far removed from that which is supremely rich and glorious.

8. And therefore Divine Wisdom, grieving for such as these, who make

---

<sup>95</sup>1 Corinthians iii, 19.

<sup>96</sup>Romans i, 22.

<sup>97</sup>1 Corinthians iii, 18-19.

<sup>98</sup>[*Lit.*, 'is supreme.']

<sup>99</sup>[The word is applicable to any kind of preferential position.]

<sup>100</sup>Genesis xxi, 10.

themselves vile, low, miserable and poor, because they love the things in this world which seem to them so rich and beautiful, addresses an exclamation to them in the Proverbs, saying: *O viri, ad vos clamito, et vox mea ad filios hominum. Intelligite, parvuli, astutiam, et insipientes, animadvertite. Audite quia de rebus magnis locutura sum.* And farther on he continues: *Mecum sunt divitoe, et gloria, opes superboe et justicia. Melior est fructus meus auro, et lapide pretioso, et genimina mea argento electo. In viis justitioe ambulo, in medio semitarum judicii, ut ditem diligentes me, et thesauros eorum repleam.*<sup>101</sup> Which signifies: O ye men, to you I call, and my voice is to the sons of men. Attend, little ones, to subtlety and sagacity; ye that are foolish, take notice. Hear, for I have to speak of great things. With me are riches and glory, high riches and justice. Better is the fruit that ye will find in me than gold and precious stones; and my generation -- namely, that which ye will engender of me in your souls -- is better than choice silver. I walk in the ways of justice, in the midst of the paths of judgment, that I may enrich those that love me and fill their treasures perfectly. -- Herein Divine Wisdom speaks to all those that set their hearts and affections upon anything of the world, according as we have already said. And she calls them 'little ones,' because they make themselves like to that which they love, which is little. And therefore she tells them to be subtle and to take note that she is treating of great things and not of things that are little like themselves. That the great riches and the glory that they love are with her and in her, and not where they think. And that high riches and justice dwell in her; for, although they think the things of this world to be all this, she tells them to take note that her things are better, saying that the fruit that they will find in them will be better for them than gold and precious stones; and that which she engenders in souls is better than the choice silver which they love; by which is understood any kind of affection that can be possessed in this life.

## CHAPTER V

*Wherein the aforementioned subject is treated and continued, and it is shown by passages and figures from Holy Scripture how necessary it is for the soul to journey to God through this dark night of the mortification of desire in all things.*

FROM what has been said it may be seen in some measure how great a distance there is between all that the creatures are in themselves and that which God is in Himself, and how souls that set their affections upon any of these creatures are at as great a distance as they from God; for, as we have said, love produces equality and likeness. This distance was clearly realized by Saint Augustine, who said in the *Soliloquies*, speaking with God: 'Miserable man that I am, when will my littleness and imperfection be able to have fellowship with Thy uprightness? Thou indeed art good, and I am evil; Thou art merciful, and I am impious; Thou art holy, I am miserable; Thou art just, I am unjust; Thou art light, I am blind; Thou, life, I, death; Thou, medicine, I, sick; Thou, supreme truth, I, utter vanity.' All this is said by this Saint.<sup>102</sup>

2. Wherefore, it is supreme ignorance for the soul to think that it will be able to pass to this high estate of union with God if first it void not the desire of all things,

---

<sup>101</sup>Proverbs viii, 4-6, 18-21.

<sup>102</sup>*Soliloq.*, chap. ii (Migne: *Patr. lat.*, Vol. XL, p. 866).

natural and supernatural, which may hinder it, according as we shall explain hereafter;<sup>103</sup> for there is the greatest possible distance between these things and that which comes to pass in this estate, which is naught else than transformation in God. For this reason Our Lord, when showing us this path, said through Saint Luke: *Qui non renuntiat omnibus quoe possidet, non potest meus esse discipulus*.<sup>104</sup> This signifies: He that renounces not all things that he possesses with his will cannot be My disciple. And this is evident; for the doctrine that the Son of God came to teach was contempt for all things, whereby a man might receive as a reward the Spirit of God in himself. For, as long as the soul rejects not all things, it has no capacity to receive the Spirit of God in pure transformation.

3. Of this we have a figure in Exodus, wherein we read that God gave not the children of Israel the food from Heaven, which was manna, until the flour which they had brought from Egypt failed them. By this is signified that first of all it is meet to renounce all things, for this angels' food is not fitting for the palate that would find delight in the food of men. And not only does the soul become incapable of receiving the Divine Spirit when it stays and pastures on other strange pleasures, but those souls greatly offend the Divine Majesty who desire spiritual food and are not content with God alone, but desire rather to intermingle desire and affection for other things. This can likewise be seen in the same book of Holy Scripture,<sup>105</sup> wherein it is said that, not content with that simplest of food, they desired and craved fleshly food.<sup>106</sup> And that Our Lord was greatly wroth that they should desire to intermingle a food that was so base and so coarse with one that was so noble<sup>107</sup> and so simple; which, though it was so, had within itself the sweetness and substance of all foods.<sup>108</sup> Wherefore, while they yet had the morsels in their mouths, as David says likewise: *Ira Dei descendit super eos*.<sup>109</sup> The wrath of God came down upon them, sending fire from Heaven and consuming many thousands of them; for God held it an unworthy thing that they should have a desire for other food when He had given them food from Heaven.

4. Oh, did spiritual persons but know how much good and what great abundance of spirit they lose through not seeking to raise up their desires above childish things, and how in this simple spiritual food they would find the sweetness of all things, if they desired not to taste those things! But such food gives them no pleasure, for the reason why the children of Israel received not the sweetness of all foods that was contained in the manna was that they would not reserve their desire for it alone. So that they failed to

---

<sup>103</sup>So Alc. The other authorities have merely: 'which may pertain to it,' and e.p. adds to this: 'through self-love.' Even when softened by Diego de Pesões this phrase of the Saint did not escape denunciation, and it was the first of the 'propositions' condemned in his writings (cf. General Introduction, VI, above). It was defended by P. Basilio Ponce de León in his *Reply* (p. lx), and more extensively by P. Nicolás de Jesões Mar'a (*Elucidatio*, Pt. II, Chap i, pp. 125-40). In reality, little defence is needed other than that contained in the last chapters of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, which clearly show the harm caused by supernatural favours, when these are abused, to the memory, the understanding and the will. Who, after all, can doubt that we may abuse 'things supernatural' and by such abuse hinder the soul from attaining union with God?

<sup>104</sup>St. Luke xiv, 33.

<sup>105</sup>E.p. alters this to: 'in the same Scripture.' [It does not, in fact, occur in the same book.]

<sup>106</sup>Numbers xi, 4.

<sup>107</sup>[*Lit.*, 'so high.']

<sup>108</sup>[*Wisdom* xvi, 20.]

<sup>109</sup>Psalms lxxvii, 31 [A.V. lxxviii, 31].

find in the manna all the sweetness and strength that they could wish, not because it was not contained in the manna, but because they desired some other thing. Thus he that will love some other thing together with God of a certainty makes little account of God, for he weighs in the balance against God that which, as we have said, is at the greatest possible distance from God.

5. It is well known by experience that, when the will of a man is affectioned to one thing, he prizes it more than any other; although some other thing may be much better, he takes less pleasure in it. And if he wishes to enjoy both, he is bound to wrong the more important, because he makes an equality between them. Wherefore, since there is naught that equals God, the soul that loves some other thing together with Him, or clings to it, does Him a grievous wrong. And if this is so, what would it be doing if it loved anything more than God?

6. It is this, too, that was denoted by the command of God to Moses that he should ascend the Mount to speak with Him: He commanded him not only to ascend it alone, leaving the children of Israel below, but not even to allow the beasts to feed over against the Mount.<sup>110</sup> By this He signified that the soul that is to ascend this mount of perfection, to commune with God, must not only renounce all things and leave them below, but must not even allow the desires, which are the beasts, to pasture over against this mount -- that is, upon other things which are not purely God, in Whom -- that is, in the state of perfection -- every desire ceases. So he that journeys on the road and makes the ascent to God must needs be habitually careful to quell and mortify the desires; and the greater the speed wherewith a soul does this, the sooner will it reach the end of its journey. Until these be quelled, it cannot reach the end, however much it practise the virtues, since it is unable to attain to perfection in them; for this perfection consists in voiding and stripping and purifying the soul of every desire. Of this we have another very striking figure in Genesis, where we read that, when the patriarch Jacob desired to ascend Mount Bethel, in order to build an altar there to God whereon he should offer Him sacrifice, he first commanded all his people to do three things: one was that they should cast away from them all strange gods; the second, that they should purify themselves; the third, that they should change their garments.<sup>111</sup>

7. By these three things it is signified that any soul that will ascend this mount in order to make of itself an altar whereon it may offer to God the sacrifice of pure love and praise and pure reverence, must, before ascending to the summit of the mount, have done these three things aforementioned perfectly. First, it must cast away all strange gods -- namely, all strange affections and attachments; secondly, it must purify itself of the remnants which the desires aforementioned have left in the soul, by means of the dark night of sense whereof we are speaking, habitually denying them and repenting itself of them; and thirdly, in order to reach the summit of this high mount, it must have changed its garments, which, through its observance of the first two things, God will change for it, from old to new, by giving it a new understanding of God in God, the old human understanding being cast aside; and a new love of God in God, the will being now stripped of all its old desires and human pleasures, and the soul being brought into a new state of knowledge and profound delight, all other old images and forms of knowledge having been cast away, and all that belongs to the old man, which is the aptitude of the natural self, quelled, and the soul clothed with a new supernatural

---

<sup>110</sup>[Exodus xxxiv, 2-3.] E.p.: 'within sight of the Mount.' A, B: 'near the Mount.'

<sup>111</sup>Gen. xxxv, 2.

aptitude with respect to all its faculties. So that its operation, which before was human, has become Divine, which is that that is attained in the state of union, wherein the soul becomes naught else than an altar whereon God is adored in praise and love, and God alone is upon it. For this cause God commanded that the altar whereon the Ark of the Covenant was to be laid should be hollow within;<sup>112</sup> so that the soul may understand how completely empty of all things God desires it to be, that it may be an altar worthy of the presence of His Majesty. On this altar it was likewise forbidden that there should be any strange fire, or that its own fire should ever fail; and so essential was this that, because Nadab and Abiu, who were the sons of the High Priest Aaron, offered strange fire upon His Altar, Our Lord was wroth and slew them there before the altar.<sup>113</sup> By this we are to understand that the love of God must never fail in the soul, so that the soul may be a worthy altar, and so that no other love must be mingled with it.

8. God permits not that any other thing should dwell together with Him. Wherefore we read in the First Book the Kings that, when the Philistines put the Ark of the Covenant into the temple where their idol was, the idol was cast down upon the ground at the dawn of each day, and broken to pieces.<sup>114</sup> And He permits and wills that there should be only one desire where He is, which is to keep the law of God perfectly, and to bear upon oneself the Cross of Christ. And thus naught else is said in the Divine Scripture to have been commanded by God to be put in the Ark, where the manna was, save the book of the Law,<sup>115</sup> and the rod Moses,<sup>116</sup> which signifies the Cross. For the soul that aspires naught else than the keeping of the law of the Lord perfectly and the bearing of the Cross of Christ will be a true Ark, containing within itself the true manna, which is God, when that soul attains to a perfect possession within itself of this law and this rod, without any other thing soever.

## CHAPTER VI

*Wherein are treated two serious evils caused in the soul by the desires, the one evil being privative and the other positive.*

IN order that what we have said may be the more clearly and fully understood, it will be well to set down here and state how these desires are the cause of two serious evils in the soul: the one is that they deprive it of the Spirit of God, and the other is that the soul wherein they dwell is wearied, tormented, darkened, defiled and weakened, according to that which is said in Jeremias, Chapter II: *Duo mala fecit Populus meus: dereliquerunt fontem aquoe vivoe, et foderunt sibi cisternas, dissipatas, quoe continere non valent aquas.* Which signifies: They have forsaken Me, Who am the fountain of living water, and they have hewed them out broken cisterns, that can hold no water.<sup>117</sup> Those two evils -- namely, the privative and the positive -- may be caused by any disordered act of the desire. And, speaking first of all, of the privative, it is clear from the

---

<sup>112</sup>Exodus xxvii, 8.

<sup>113</sup>Leviticus x, 1-2.

<sup>114</sup>1 Kings [A.V., I Samuel] v, 3-5.

<sup>115</sup>Deut. xxxi, 26.

<sup>116</sup>Numbers xvii, 10. [More properly, 'the rod of Aaron.']

<sup>117</sup>Jeremias ii, 13.

very fact that the soul becomes affectioned to a thing which comes under the head of creature, that the more the desire for that thing fills the soul,<sup>118</sup> the less capacity has the soul for God; inasmuch as two contraries, according to the philosophers, cannot coexist in one person; and further, since, as we said in the fourth chapter, affection for God and affection for creatures are contraries, there cannot be contained within one will affection for creatures and affection for God. For what has the creature to do with the Creator? What has sensual to do with spiritual? Visible with invisible? Temporal with eternal? Food that is heavenly, spiritual and pure with food that is of sense alone and is purely sensual? Christlike poverty of spirit with attachment to aught soever?

2. Wherefore, as in natural generation no form can be introduced unless the preceding, contrary form is first expelled from the subject, which form, while present, is an impediment to the other by reason of the contrariety which the two have between each other; even so, for as long as the soul is subjected to the sensual spirit, the spirit which is pure and spiritual cannot enter it. Wherefore our Saviour said through Saint Matthew: *Non est bonum sumere panem filiorum, et mittere canibus.*<sup>119</sup> That is: It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to the dogs. And elsewhere, too, he says through the same Evangelist: *Nolite sanctum dare canibus.*<sup>120</sup> Which signifies: Give not that which is holy to the dogs. In these passages Our Lord compares those who renounce their creature-desires, and prepare themselves to receive the Spirit of God in purity, to the children of God; and those who would have their desire feed upon the creatures, to dogs. For it is given to children to eat with their father at table and from his dish, which is to feed upon His Spirit, and to dogs are given the crumbs which fall from the table.

3. From this we are to learn that all created things are crumbs that have fallen from the table of God. Wherefore he that feeds ever upon<sup>121</sup> the creatures is rightly called a dog, and therefore the bread is taken from the children, because they desire not to rise above feeding upon the crumbs, which are created things, to the Uncreated Spirit of their Father. Therefore, like dogs, they are ever hungering, and justly so, because the crumbs serve to whet their appetite rather than to satisfy their hunger. And thus David says of them: *Famem patientur ut canes, et circuibunt civitatem. Si vero non fuerint saturati, et murmurabunt.*<sup>122</sup> Which signifies: They shall suffer hunger like dogs and shall go round about the city, and, if they find not enough to fill them, they shall murmur. For this is the nature of one that has desires, that he is ever discontented and dissatisfied, like one that suffers hunger; for what has the hunger which all the creatures suffer to do with the fullness which is caused by the Spirit of God? Wherefore this fullness that is uncreated cannot enter the soul, if there be not first cast out that other created hunger which belongs to the desire of the soul; for, as we have said two contraries cannot dwell in one person, the which contraries in this case are hunger and fullness.

4. From what has been said it will be seen how much greater is the work of God<sup>123</sup> in the cleansing and the purging of a soul from these contrarieties than in the

---

<sup>118</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the greater the bulk that that desire has in the soul.']

<sup>119</sup>St. Matthew xv, 26.

<sup>120</sup>St. Matthew vii, 6.

<sup>121</sup>[*Lit.*, 'he that goes feeding upon.']

<sup>122</sup>Psalm lviii, 15-16 [A.V., lix, 14-15].

<sup>123</sup>[*Lit.*, 'how much more God does.']

creating of that soul from nothing. For thee contrarieties, these contrary desires and affections, are more completely opposed to God and offer Him greater resistance than does nothingness; for nothingness resists not at all. And let this suffice with respect to the first of the important evils which are inflicted upon the soul by the desires -- namely, resistance to the Spirit of God -- since much has been said of this above.

5. Let us now speak of the second effect which they cause in the soul. This is of many kinds, because the desires weary the soul and torment and darken it, and defile it and weaken it. Of these five things we shall speak separately, in their turn.

6. With regard to the first, it is clear that the desires weary and fatigue the soul; for they are like restless and discontented children, who are ever demanding this or that from their mother, and are never contented. And even as one that digs because he covets a treasure is wearied and fatigued, even so is the soul weary and fatigued in order to attain that which its desires demand of it; and although in the end it may attain it, it is still weary, because it is never satisfied; for, after all, the cisterns which it is digging are broken, and cannot hold water to satisfy thirst. And thus, as Isaias says: *Lassus adhuc sitit, et anima ejus vacua est.*<sup>124</sup> Which signifies: His desire is empty. And the soul that has desires is wearied and fatigued; for it is like a man that is sick of a fever, who finds himself no better until the fever leaves him, and whose thirst increases with every moment. For, as is said in the Book of Job: *Cum satiatus fuerit, arctabitur, oestuabit, et omnis dolor irruet super eum.*<sup>125</sup> Which signifies: When he has satisfied his desire, he will be the more oppressed and straitened; the heat of desire hath increased in his soul and thus every sorrow will fall upon him. The soul is wearied and fatigued by its desires, because it is wounded and moved and disturbed by them as is water by the winds; in just the same way they disturb it, allowing it not to rest in any place or in any thing soever. And of such a soul says Isaias: *Cor impii quasi mare fervens.*<sup>126</sup> 'The heart of the wicked man is like the sea when it rages.' And he is a wicked man that conquers not his desires. The soul that would fain satisfy its desires grows wearied and fatigued; for it is like one that, being an hungered, opens his mouth that he may sate himself with wind, whereupon, instead of being satisfied, his craving becomes greater, for the wind is no food for him. To this purpose said Jeremias: *In desiderio animae sum attraxit ventum amoris sui.*<sup>127</sup> As though he were to say: In the desire of his will he snuffed up the wind of his affection. And he then tries to describe the aridity wherein such a soul remains, and warns it, saying: *Prohibe pedem tuum a nuditate, et guttur tuum a siti.*<sup>128</sup> Which signifies: Keep thy foot (that is, thy thought) from being bare and thy throat from thirst (that is to say, thy will from the indulgence of the desire which causes greater dryness); and, even as the lover is wearied and fatigued upon the day of his hopes, when his attempt has proved to be vain, so the soul is wearied and fatigued by all its desires and by indulgence in them, since they all cause it greater emptiness and hunger; for, as is often said, desire is like the fire, which increases as wood is thrown upon it, and which, when it has consumed the wood, must needs die.

7. And in this regard it is still worse with desire; for the fire goes down when the

---

<sup>124</sup>Isaias xxix, 8. The editions supply the translation of the first part of the Latin text, which the Saint and the Codices omitted: 'After being wearied and fatigued, he yet thirsteth,' etc.

<sup>125</sup>Job xx, 22.

<sup>126</sup>Isaias lvii, 20.

<sup>127</sup>Jeremias ii, 24.

<sup>128</sup>Jeremias ii, 25.



wood is consumed, but desire, though it increases when fuel is added to it, decreases not correspondingly when the fuel is consumed; on the contrary, instead of going down, as does the fire when its fuel is consumed, it grows weak through weariness, for its hunger is increased and its food diminished. And of this Isaias speaks, saying: *Declinabit ad dexteram, et esuriet: et comedet ad sinistram, et non saturabitur.*<sup>129</sup> This signifies: He shall turn to the right hand, and shall be hungry; and he shall eat on the left hand, and shall not be filled. For they that mortify not their desires, when they 'turn,' justly see the fullness of the sweetness of spirit of those who are at the right hand of God, which fullness is not granted to themselves; and justly, too, when they eat on the left hand,<sup>130</sup> by which is meant the satisfaction of their desire with some creature comfort, they are not filled, for, leaving aside that which alone can satisfy, they feed on that which causes them greater hunger. It is clear, then, that the desires weary and fatigue the soul.

## CHAPTER VII

*Wherein is shown how the desires torment the soul. This is proved likewise by comparison and quotations.*

THE second kind of positive evil which the desires cause the soul is in their tormenting and afflicting of it, after the manner of one who is in torment through being bound with cords from which he has no relief until he be freed. And of these David says: *Funes peccatorum circumplexi sunt me.*<sup>131</sup> The cords of my sins, which are my desires, have constrained me round about. And, even as one that lies naked upon thorns and briars is tormented and afflicted, even so is the soul tormented and afflicted when it rests upon its desires. For they take hold upon it and distress it and cause it pain, even as do thorns. Of these David says likewise: *Circumdederunt me sicut apes: et exarserunt sicut ignis in spinis.*<sup>132</sup> Which signifies: They compassed me about like bees, wounding me with their stings, and they were enkindled against me, like fire among thorns; for in the desires, which are the thorns, increases the fire of anguish and torment. And even as the husbandman, coveting the harvest for which he hopes, afflicts and torments the ox in the plough, even so does concupiscence afflict a soul that is subject to its desire to attain that for which it longs. This can be clearly seen in that desire which Dalila had to know whence Samson derived his strength that was so great, for the Scripture says that it fatigued and tormented her so much that it caused her to swoon, almost to the point of death, and she said: *Defecit anima ejus, et ad mortem usque lassata est.*<sup>133</sup>

2. The more intense is the desire, the greater is the torment which it causes the soul. So that the torment increases with the desire; and the greater are the desires

---

<sup>129</sup>Isaias ix, 20.

<sup>130</sup>Thus Alc. [with 'run' for 'eat']. A, B, e.p. read: '. . . when they turn from the way of God (which is the right hand) are justly hungered, for they merit not the fullness of the sweetness of spirit. And justly, too, when they eat on the left hand,' etc. [While agreeing with P. Silverio that Alc. gives the better reading, I prefer 'eat' to 'run': it is nearer the Scriptural passage and the two Spanish words, *comen* and *corren*, could easily be confused in MS.]

<sup>131</sup>Psalm cxviii, 61 [A.V., cxix, 61].

<sup>132</sup>Psalm cxvii, 12 [A.V., cxviii, 12].

<sup>133</sup>Judges xvi, 16. [Actually it was Samson, not Dalila, who was 'wearied even until death.']

which possess the soul, the greater are its torments; for in such a soul is fulfilled, even in this life, that which is said in the Apocalypse concerning Babylon, in these words: *Quantum glorificavit se, et in deliciis fuit, tantum date illi tormentum, et luctum.*<sup>134</sup> That is: As much as she has wished to exalt and fulfil her desires, so much give ye to her torment and anguish. And even as one that falls into the hands of his enemies is tormented and afflicted, even so is the soul tormented and afflicted that is led away by its desires. Of this there is a figure in the Book of the Judges, wherein it may be read that that strong man, Samson, who at one time was strong and free and a judge of Israel, fell into the power of his enemies, and they took his strength from him, and put out his eyes, and bound him in a mill, to grind corn,<sup>135</sup> wherein they tormented and afflicted him greatly;<sup>136</sup> and thus it happens to the soul in which these its enemies, the desires, live and rule; for the first thing that they do is to weaken the soul and blind it, as we shall say below; and then they afflict and torment it, binding it to the mill of concupiscence; and the bonds with which it is bound are its own desires.

3. Wherefore God, having compassion on these that with such great labour, and at such cost to themselves, go about endeavouring to satisfy the hunger and thirst of their desire in the creatures, says to them through Isaias: *Omnes sitientes, venite ad aquas; et qui non habetis argentum, properate, emite, et comedite: venite, emite absque argento vinum et lac. Quare appenditis argentum non in panibus, et laborem vestrum non in saturitate?*<sup>137</sup> As though He were to say: All ye that have thirst of desire, come to the waters, and all ye that have no silver of your own will and desires, make haste; buy from Me and eat; come and buy from Me wine and milk (that is, spiritual sweetness and peace) without the silver of your own will, and without giving Me any labour in exchange for it, as ye give for your desires. Wherefore do ye give the silver of your will for that which is not bread -- namely, that of the Divine Spirit -- and set the labour of your desires upon that which cannot satisfy you? Come, hearkening to Me, and ye shall eat the good that ye desire and your soul shall delight itself in fatness.

4. This attaining to fatness is a going forth from all pleasures of the creatures; for the creatures torment, but the Spirit of God refreshes. And thus He calls us through Saint Matthew, saying: *Venite ad me omnes, qui laboratis et onerati estis, et ego reficiam vos, et invenietis requiem animabus vestris.*<sup>138</sup> As though He were to say: All ye that go about tormented, afflicted and burdened with the burden of your cares and desires, go forth from them, come to Me, and I will refresh you and ye shall find for your souls the rest which your desires take from you, wherefore they are a heavy burden, for David says of them: *Sicut onus grave gravatoe sunt super me.*<sup>139</sup>

## CHAPTER VIII

*Wherein is shown how the desires darken and blind the soul.*

---

<sup>134</sup>Apocalypse xviii, 7.

<sup>135</sup>[*Lit.*, 'bound him to grind in a mill.']

<sup>136</sup>Judges xvi, 21.

<sup>137</sup>Isaias lv, 1-2.

<sup>138</sup>St. Matthew xi, 28-9.

<sup>139</sup>Psalms xxxvii, 5 [A.V., xxxviii, 4].

THE third evil that the desires cause in the soul is that they blind and darken it. Even as vapours darken the air and allow not the bright sun to shine; or as a mirror that is clouded over cannot receive within itself a clear image; or as water defiled by mud reflects not the visage of one that looks therein; even so the soul that is clouded by the desires is darkened in the understanding and allows neither<sup>140</sup> the sun of natural reason nor that of the supernatural Wisdom of God to shine upon it and illumine it clearly. And thus David, speaking to this purpose, says: *Comprehenderunt me iniquitates meae, et non potui, ut viderem.*<sup>141</sup> Which signifies: Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, and I could have no power to see.

2. And, at this same time, when the soul is darkened in the understanding, it is benumbed also in the will, and the memory becomes dull and disordered in its due operation. For, as these faculties in their operations depend upon the understanding, it is clear that, when the understanding is impeded, they will become disordered and troubled. And thus David says: *Anima mea turbata est valde.*<sup>142</sup> That is: My soul is sorely troubled. Which is as much as to say, 'disordered in its faculties.' For, as we say, the understanding has no more capacity for receiving enlightenment from the wisdom of God than has the air, when it is dark, for receiving enlightenment from the sun; neither has the will any power to embrace God within itself in pure love, even as the mirror that is clouded with vapour has no power to reflect clearly within itself any visage,<sup>143</sup> and even less power has the memory which is clouded by the darkness of desire to take clearly upon itself the form of the image of God, just as the muddled water cannot show forth clearly the visage of one that looks at himself therein.

3. Desire blinds and darkens the soul; for desire, as such, is blind, since of itself it has no understanding in itself, the reason being to it always, as it were, a child leading a blind man. And hence it comes to pass that, whensoever the soul is guided by its desire, it becomes blind; for this is as if one that sees were guided by one that sees not, which is, as it were, for both to be blind. And that which follows from this is that which Our Lord says through Saint Matthew: *Si coecus coeco ducatum proestet, ambo in foveam cadunt.*<sup>144</sup> 'If the blind lead the blind, both fall into the pit.' Of little use are its eyes to a moth, since desire for the beauty of the light dazzles it and leads it into the flame.<sup>145</sup> And even so we may say that one who feeds upon desire is like a fish that is dazzled, upon which the light acts rather as darkness, preventing it from seeing the snares which the fishermen are preparing for it. This is very well expressed by David himself, where he says of such persons: *Supercecidit ignis, et non viderunt solem.*<sup>146</sup> Which signifies: There came upon them the fire, which burns with its heat and dazzles with its light. And it is this that desire does to the soul, enkindling its concupiscence and dazzling its understanding so that it cannot see its light. For the cause of its being thus dazzled is that when another light of a different kind is set before the eye, the visual faculty is attracted by that which is interposed so that it sees not the other; and, as the desire is set so near to the soul as to be within the soul itself, the soul meets this first

---

<sup>140</sup>[*Lit.*, 'gives no occasion either for,' etc.]

<sup>141</sup>Psalm xxxix, 13 [A.V., xl, 12.]

<sup>142</sup>Psalm vi, 4 [A.V., vi, 3].

<sup>143</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the present visage.']

<sup>144</sup>St. Matthew xv, 14.

<sup>145</sup>[*hoguera*. More exactly: 'fire,' 'bonfire,' 'blaze.']

<sup>146</sup>Psalm lvii, 9 [cf. A.V., lviii, 8].

light and is attracted by it; and thus it is unable to see the light of clear understanding, neither will see it until the dazzling power of desire is taken away from it.

4. For this reason one must greatly lament the ignorance of certain men, who burden themselves with extraordinary penances and with many other voluntary practices, and think that this practice or that will suffice to bring them to the union of Divine Wisdom; but such will not be the case if they endeavour not diligently to mortify their desires. If they were careful to bestow half of that labour on this, they would profit more in a month than they profit by all the other practices in many years. For, just as it is necessary to till the earth if it is to bear fruit, and unless it be tilled it bears naught but weeds, just so is mortification of the desires necessary if the soul is to profit. Without this mortification, I make bold to say, the soul no more achieves progress on the road to perfection and to the knowledge of God of itself, however many efforts it may make, than the seed grows when it is cast upon untilled ground. Wherefore the darkness and rudeness of the soul will not be taken from it until the desires be quenched. For these desires are like cataracts, or like motes in the eye, which obstruct the sight until they be taken away.

5. And thus David, realizing how blind are these souls, and how completely impeded from beholding the light of truth, and how wroth is God with them, speaks to them, saying: *Priusquam intelligerent spinos vestros rhamnum: sicut viventes, sic in ira absorber eos.*<sup>147</sup> And this is as though He had said: Before your thorns (that is, your desires) harden and grow, changing from tender thorns into a thick hedge and shutting out the sight of God even as oft-times the living find their thread of life broken in the midst of its course, even so will God swallow them up in His wrath. For the desires that are living in the soul, so that it cannot understand Him,<sup>148</sup> will be swallowed up by God by means of chastisement and correction, either in this life or in the next, and this will come to pass through purgation. And He says that He will swallow them up in wrath, because that which is suffered in the mortification of the desires is punishment for the ruin which they have wrought in the soul.

6. Oh, if men but knew how great is the blessing of Divine light whereof they are deprived by this blindness which proceeds from their affections and desires, and into what great hurts and evils these make them to fall day after day, for so long as they mortify them not! For a man must not rely upon a clear understanding, or upon gifts that he has received from God, and think that he may indulge his affection or desire, and will not be blinded and darkened, and fall gradually into a worse estate. For who would have said that a man so perfect in wisdom and the gifts of God as was Solomon would have been reduced to such blindness and torpor of the will as to make altars to so many idols and to worship them himself, when he was old?<sup>149</sup> Yet no more was needed to bring him to this than the affection which he had for women and his neglect to deny the desires and delights of his heart. For he himself says concerning himself, in Ecclesiastes, that he denied not his heart that which it demanded of him.<sup>150</sup> And this man was capable of being so completely led away by his desires that, although it is true that at the beginning he was cautious, nevertheless, because he denied them not, they gradually blinded and darkened his understanding, so that in the end they succeeded in

---

<sup>147</sup>Psalm lvii, 10 [A.V., lviii, 9].

<sup>148</sup>[*Lit.*, 'before it can understand God.']

<sup>149</sup>3 Kings [A.V., 1 Kings] xi, 4.

<sup>150</sup>Ecclesiastes ii, 10.

quenching that great light of wisdom which God had given him, and therefore in his old age he foresook God.

7. And if unmortified desires could do so much in this man who knew so well the distance that lies between good and evil, what will they not be capable of accomplishing by working upon our ignorance? For we, as God said to the prophet Jonas concerning the Ninivites, cannot discern between<sup>151</sup> our right hand and our left.<sup>152</sup> At every step we hold evil to be good, and good, evil, and this arises from our own nature. What, then, will come to pass if to our natural darkness is added the hindrance of desire?<sup>153</sup> Naught but that which Isaias describes thus: *Palpavimus, sicut coeci parietem, et quasi absque oculis attreetavimus: impegimus meridie, quasi in tenebris*.<sup>154</sup> The prophet is speaking with those who love to follow these their desires. It is as if he had said: We have groped for the wall as though we were blind, and we have been groping as though we had no eyes, and our blindness has attained to such a point that we have stumbled at midday as though it were in the darkness. For he that is blinded by desire has this property, that, when he is set in the midst of truth and of that which is good for him, he can no more see them than if he were in darkness.

## CHAPTER IX

*Wherein is described how the desires defile the soul. This is proved by comparisons and quotations from Holy Scripture.*

THE fourth evil which the desires cause in the soul is that they stain and defile it, as is taught in Ecclesiasticus, in these words: *Qui tetigerit picem, inquinabitur ab ea*.<sup>155</sup> This signifies: He that toucheth pitch shall be defiled with it. And a man touches pitch when he allows the desire of his will to be satisfied by any creature. Here it is to be noted that the Wise Man compares the creatures to pitch; for there is more difference between excellence of soul and the best of the creatures<sup>156</sup> than there is between pure diamond,<sup>157</sup> or fine gold, and pitch. And just as gold or diamond, if it were heated and placed upon pitch, would become foul and be stained by it, inasmuch as the heat would have cajoled and allured the pitch, even so the soul that is hot with desire for any creature draws forth foulness from it through the heat of its desire and is stained by it. And there is more difference between the soul and other corporeal creatures than between a liquid that is highly clarified and mud that is most foul. Wherefore, even as such a liquid would be defiled if it were mingled with mud, so is the soul defiled that clings to creatures, since by doing this it becomes like to the said creatures. And in the same way that traces of soot would defile a face that is very lovely and perfect, even in this way do disordered desires befoul and defile the soul that has them, the which soul

---

<sup>151</sup>[*Lit.*, 'we ... know not what there is between.']

<sup>152</sup>Jonas iv, 11.

<sup>153</sup>[*Lit.*, 'is added desire.']

<sup>154</sup>Isaias lix, 10.

<sup>155</sup>Ecclesiasticus xiii, 1.

<sup>156</sup>[More literally: 'and all the best that is of the creatures.' 'Best' is neuter and refers to qualities, appurtenances, etc.]

<sup>157</sup>[*Lit.*, 'bright diamond.']

is in itself a most lovely and perfect image of God.

2. Wherefore Jeremias, lamenting the ravages of foulness which these disordered affections cause in the soul, speaks first of its beauty, and then of its foulness, saying: *Candidiores sunt Nazaroei ejus nive, nitidiores lacte, rubicundiores ebore antiquo, sapphiro pulchriores. Denigrata est super carbones facies eorum, et non sunt cogniti in plateis.*<sup>158</sup> Which signifies: Its hair -- that is to say, that of the soul -- is more excellent in whiteness than the snow, clearer<sup>159</sup> than milk, and ruddier than old ivory, and lovelier than the sapphire stone. Their face has now become blacker than coal and they are not known in the streets.<sup>160</sup> By the hair we here understand the affections and thoughts of the soul, which, ordered as God orders them -- that is, in God Himself -- are whiter than snow, and clearer<sup>161</sup> than milk, and ruddier than ivory, and lovelier than the sapphire. By these four things is understood every kind of beauty and excellence of corporeal creatures, higher than which, says the writer, are the soul and its operations, which are the Nazarites or the hair aforementioned; the which Nazarites, being unruly,<sup>162</sup> with their lives ordered in a way that God ordered not -- that is, being set upon the creatures -- have their face (says Jeremias) made and turned blacker than coal.

3. All this harm, and more, is done to the beauty of the soul by its unruly desires for the things of this world; so much so that, if we set out to speak of the foul and vile appearance that the desires can give the soul, we should find nothing, however full of cobwebs and worms it might be, not even the corruption of a dead body, nor aught else that is impure and vile, nor aught that can exist and be imagined in this life, to which we could compare it. For, although it is true that the unruly soul, in its natural being, is as perfect as when God created it, yet, in its reasonable being, it is vile, abominable, foul, black and full of all the evils that are here being described, and many more. For, as we shall afterwards say, a single unruly desire, although there be in it no matter of mortal sin, suffices to bring a soul into such bondage, foulness and vileness that it can in no wise come to accord with God in union<sup>163</sup> until the desire be purified. What, then, will be the vileness of the soul that is completely unrestrained with respect to its own passions and given up to its desires, and how far removed will it be from God and from His purity?

4. It is impossible to explain in words, or to cause to be understood by the understanding, what variety of impurity is caused in the soul by a variety of desires. For, if it could be expressed and understood, it would be a wondrous thing, and one also which would fill us with pity, to see how each desire, in accordance with its quality and degree, be it greater or smaller, leaves in the soul its mark and deposit of impurity and vileness, and how one single disorder of the reason can be the source of innumerable different impurities, some greater, some less, each one after its kind. For, even as the soul of the righteous man has in one single perfection, which is uprightness of soul,

---

<sup>158</sup>Lamentations iv, 7-8.

<sup>159</sup>[*Lit.*, *m̄s resplandecientes*, 'more brilliant,' 'more luminous.']

<sup>160</sup>[*Lit.*, *plazas* (derived from the Latin *plateas*), which now, however, has the meaning of 'squares,' '(market) places.']

<sup>161</sup>['Clearer' here is *m̄s claros*; the adjective is rendered 'bright' elsewhere.]

<sup>162</sup>[The words translated 'unruly,' 'disordered,' here and elsewhere, and occasionally 'unrestrained,' are the same in the original: *desordenado*.]

<sup>163</sup>[The Spanish of the text reads literally: 'in a union.']

innumerable gifts of the greatest richness, and many virtues of the greatest loveliness, each one different and full of grace after its kind according to the multitude and the diversity of the affections of love which it has had in God, even so the unruly soul, according to the variety of the desires which it has for the creatures, has in itself a miserable variety of impurities and meannesses, wherewith it is endowed<sup>164</sup> by the said desires.

5. The variety of these desires is well illustrated in the Book of Ezechiel, where it is written that God showed this Prophet, in the interior of the Temple, painted around its walls, all likenesses of creeping things which crawl on the ground, and all the abomination of unclean beasts.<sup>165</sup> And then God said to Ezechiel: 'Son of man, hast thou not indeed seen the abominations that these do, each one in the secrecy of his chamber?'<sup>166</sup> And God commanded the Prophet to go in farther and he would see greater abominations; and he says that he there saw women seated, weeping for Adonis, the god of love.<sup>167</sup> And God commanded him to go in farther still, and he would see yet greater abominations, and he says that he saw there five-and-twenty old men whose backs were turned toward the Temple.<sup>168</sup>

6. The diversity of creeping things and unclean beasts that were painted in the first chamber of the Temple are the thoughts and conceptions which the understanding fashions from the lowly things of earth, and from all the creatures, which are painted, just as they are, in the temple of the soul, when the soul embarrasses its understanding with them, which is the soul's first habitation. The women that were farther within, in the second habitation, weeping for the god Adonis, are the desires that are in the second faculty of the soul, which is the will; the which are, as it were, weeping, inasmuch as they covet that to which the will is affectioned, which are the creeping things painted in the understandings. And the men that were in the third habitation are the images and representations of the creatures, which the third part of the soul -- namely memory -- keeps and reflects upon<sup>169</sup> within itself. Of these it is said that their backs are turned toward the Temple because when the soul, according to these three faculties, completely and perfectly embraces anything that is of the earth, it can be said to have its back turned toward the Temple of God, which is the right reason of the soul, which admits within itself nothing that is of creatures.

7. And let this now suffice for the understanding of this foul disorder of the soul with respect to its desires. For if we had to treat in detail of the lesser foulness which these imperfections and their variety make and cause in the soul, and that which is caused by venial sins, which is still greater than that of the imperfections, and their great variety, and likewise that which is caused by the desires for mortal sin, which is complete foulness of the soul, and its great variety, according to the variety and multitude of all these three things, we should never end, nor would the understanding of angels suffice to understand it. That which I say, and that which is to the point for my purpose, is that any desire, although it be for but the smallest imperfection, stains and

---

<sup>164</sup>[The verb is *pintar*, 'paint': perhaps 'corrupt' is intended. The same verb occurs in the following sentence.]

<sup>165</sup>Ezechiel viii, 10.

<sup>166</sup>[Ezechiel viii, 12.]

<sup>167</sup>Ezechiel viii, 14.

<sup>168</sup>Ezechiel viii, 16.

<sup>169</sup>[*Lit.*, 'revolves'--'turns over in its mind' in our common idiom.]

defiles the soul.

## CHAPTER X

*Wherein is described how the desires weaken the soul in virtue and make it lukewarm.*

THE fifth way in which the desires harm the soul is by making it lukewarm and weak, so that it has no strength to follow after virtue and to persevere therein. For as the strength of the desire, when it is set upon various aims, is less than if it were set wholly on one thing alone, and as, the more are the aims whereon it is set, the less of it there is for each of them, for this cause philosophers say that virtue in union is stronger than if it be dispersed. Wherefore it is clear that, if the desire of the will be dispersed among other things than virtue, it must be weaker as regards virtue. And thus the soul whose will is set upon various trifles is like water, which, having a place below wherein to empty itself, never rises; and such a soul has no profit. For this cause the patriarch Jacob compared his son Ruben to water poured out, because in a certain sin he had given rein to his desires. And he said: 'Thou art poured out like water; grow thou not.'<sup>170</sup> As though he had said: Since thou art poured out like water as to the desires, thou shalt not grow in virtue. And thus, as hot water, when uncovered, readily loses heat, and as aromatic spices, when they are unwrapped, gradually lose the fragrance and strength of their perfume, even so the soul that is not recollected in one single desire for God loses heat and vigour in its virtue. This was well understood by David, when he said, speaking with God: I will keep my strength for Thee.<sup>171</sup> That is, concentrating the strength of my desires upon Thee alone.

2. And the desires weaken the virtue of the soul, because they are to it like the shoots that grow about a tree, and take away its virtue so that it cannot bring forth so much fruit. And of such souls as these says the Lord: *Voe proegnantibus, et nutrientibus in illis diebus.*<sup>172</sup> That is: Woe to them that in those days are with child and to them that give suck. This being with child and giving suck is understood with respect to the desires; which, if they be not pruned, will ever be taking more virtue from the soul, and will grow to the harm of the soul, like the shoots upon the tree. Wherefore Our Lord counsels us, saying: Have your loins girt about<sup>173</sup> -- the loins signifying here the desires. And indeed, they are also like leeches, which are ever sucking the blood from the veins, for thus the Preacher terms them when he says: The leeches are the daughters -- that is, the desires -- saying ever: *Daca, daca.*<sup>174</sup>

3. From this it is clear that the desires bring no good to the soul but rather take from it that which it has; and, if it mortify them not, they will not cease till they have wrought in it that which the children of the viper are said to work in their mother; who, as they are growing within her womb, consume her and kill her, and they themselves remain alive at her cost. Just so the desires that are not mortified grow to such a point that they kill the soul with respect to God because it has not first killed them. And they

---

<sup>170</sup>Genesis xlix, 4.

<sup>171</sup>Psalms lviii, 10 [A.V., lix, 9].

<sup>172</sup>St. Matthew xxix, 19.

<sup>173</sup>St. Luke xii, 25.

<sup>174</sup>Proverbs xxx, 15.



alone live in it. Wherefore the Preacher says: *Aufer a me Domine ventris concupiscentias.*<sup>175</sup>

4. And, even though they reach not this point, it is very piteous to consider how the desires that live in this poor soul treat it, how unhappy it is with regard to itself, how dry with respect to its neighbours, and how weary and slothful with respect to the things of God. For there is no evil humour that makes it as wearisome and difficult for a sick man to walk, or gives him a distaste for eating comparable to the weariness and distaste for following virtue which is given to a soul by desire for creatures. And thus the reason why many souls have no diligence and eagerness to gain virtue is, as a rule, that they have desires and affections which are not pure and are not fixed upon God.<sup>176</sup>

## CHAPTER XI

*Wherein it is proved necessary that the soul that would attain to Divine union should be free from desires, however slight they be.*

I EXPECT that for a long time the reader has been wishing to ask whether it be necessary, in order to attain to this high estate of perfection, to undergo first of all total mortification in all the desires, great and small, or if it will suffice to mortify some of them and to leave others, those at least which seem of little moment. For it appears to be a severe and most difficult thing for the soul to be able to attain to such purity and detachment that it has no will and affection for anything.

2. To this I reply: first, that it is true that all the desires are not equally hurtful, nor do they all equally embarrass the soul. I am speaking of those that are voluntary, for the natural desires hinder the soul little, if at all, from attaining to union, when they are not consented to nor pass beyond the first movements (I mean,<sup>177</sup> all those wherein the rational will has had no part, whether at first or afterward); and to take away these -- that is, to mortify them wholly in this life -- is impossible. And these hinder not the soul in such a way as to prevent its attainment to Divine union, even though they be not, as I say, wholly mortified; for the natural man may well have them, and yet the soul may be quite free from them according to the rational spirit. For it will sometimes come to pass that the soul will be in the full<sup>178</sup> union of the prayer of quiet in the will at the very time when these desires are dwelling in the sensual part of the soul, and yet the higher part, which is in prayer, will have nothing to do with them. But all the other voluntary desires, whether they be of mortal sin, which are the gravest, or of venial sin, which are less grave, or whether they be only of imperfections, which are the least grave of all, must be driven away every one, and the soul must be free from them all, howsoever slight they be, if it is to come to this complete union; and the reason is that the state of this Divine union consists in the soul's total transformation, according to the will, in the will of God, so that, there may be naught in the soul that is contrary to the will of God, but that, in all and through all, its movement may be that of the will of God alone.

3. It is for this reason that we say of this state that it is the making of two wills into

---

<sup>175</sup>Ecclesiasticus xxiii, 6. [In the original the last two sentences are transposed.]

<sup>176</sup>[*Lit.*, 'not pure on (or 'in') God.']

<sup>177</sup>[The original has no such explanatory phrase.]

<sup>178</sup>[That is, will be enjoying all the union that the prayer of quiet gives.]

one -- namely, into the will of God, which will of God is likewise the will of the soul. For if this soul desired any imperfection that God wills not, there would not be made one will of God, since the soul would have a will for that which God has not. It is clear, then, that for the soul to come to unite itself perfectly with God through love and will, it must first be free from all desire of the will, howsoever slight. That is, that it must not intentionally and knowingly consent with the will to imperfections, and it must have power and liberty to be able not so to consent intentionally. I say knowingly, because, unintentionally and unknowingly, or without having the power to do otherwise, it may well fall into imperfections and venial sins, and into the natural desires whereof we have spoken; for of such sins as these which are not voluntary and surreptitious it is written that the just man shall fall seven times in the day and shall rise up again.<sup>179</sup> But of the voluntary desires, which, though they be for very small things, are, as I have said, intentional venial sins, any one that is not conquered suffices to impede union.<sup>180</sup> I mean, if this habit be not mortified; for sometimes certain acts of different desires have not as much power when the habits are mortified. Still, the soul will attain to the stage of not having even these, for they likewise proceed from a habit of imperfection. But some habits of voluntary imperfections, which are never completely conquered, prevent not only the attainment of Divine union, but also progress in perfection.

4. These habitual imperfections are, for example, a common custom of much speaking, or some slight attachment which we never quite wish to conquer -- such as that to a person, a garment, a book, a cell, a particular kind of food, tittle-tattle, fancies for tasting, knowing or hearing certain things, and suchlike. Any one of these imperfections, if the soul has become attached and habituated to it, is of as great harm to its growth and progress in virtue as though it were to fall daily into many other imperfections and usual venial sins which proceed not from a habitual indulgence in any habitual and harmful attachment, and will not hinder it so much as when it has attachment to anything. For as long as it has this there is no possibility that it will make progress in perfection, even though the imperfection be extremely slight. For it comes to the same thing whether a bird be held by a slender cord or by a stout one; since, even if it be slender, the bird will be well held as though it were stout, for so long as it breaks it not and flies not away. It is true that the slender one is the easier to break; still, easy though it be, the bird will not fly away if it be not broken. And thus the soul that has attachment to anything, however much virtue it possess, will not attain to the liberty of Divine union. For the desire and the attachment of the soul have that power which the sucking-fish<sup>181</sup> is said to have when it clings to a ship; for, though but a very small fish, if it succeed in clinging to the ship, it makes it incapable of reaching the port, or of sailing on at all. It is sad to see certain souls in this plight; like rich vessels, they are laden with wealth and good works and spiritual exercises, and with the virtues and the favours that God grants them; and yet, because they have not the resolution to break with some whim or attachment or affection (which all come to the same thing), they never make progress or reach the port of perfection, though they would need to do no more than make one good flight and thus to snap that cord of desire right off, or to rid themselves of that sucking-fish of desire which clings to them.

5. It is greatly to be lamented that, when God has granted them strength to break

---

<sup>179</sup>Proverbs xxiv, 16.

<sup>180</sup>[The original omits 'union.']

<sup>181</sup>[Or 'remora.']

other and stouter cords<sup>182</sup> -- namely, affections for sins and vanities -- they should fail to attain to such blessing because they have not shaken off some childish thing which God had bidden them conquer for love of Him, and which is nothing more than a thread or a hair.<sup>183</sup> And, what is worse, not only do they make no progress, but because of this attachment they fall back, lose that which they have gained, and retrace that part of the road along which they have travelled at the cost of so much time and labour; for it is well known that, on this road, not to go forward is to turn back, and not to be gaining is to be losing. This Our Lord desired to teach us when He said: 'He that is not with Me is against Me; and he that gathereth not with Me scattereth.'<sup>184</sup> He that takes not the trouble to repair the vessel, however slight be the crack in it, is likely to spill all the liquid that is within it. The Preacher taught us this clearly when he said: He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little.<sup>185</sup> For, as he himself says, a great fire cometh from a single spark.<sup>186</sup> And thus one imperfection is sufficient to lead to another; and these lead to yet more; wherefore you will hardly ever see a soul that is negligent in conquering one desire, and that has not many more arising from the same weakness and imperfection that this desire causes. In this way they are continually filling; we have seen many persons to whom God has been granting the favour of leading them a long way, into a state of great detachment and liberty, yet who, merely through beginning to indulge some slight attachment, under the pretext of doing good, or in the guise of conversation and friendship, often lose their spirituality and desire for God and holy solitude, fall from the joy and wholehearted devotion which they had in their spiritual exercises, and cease not until they have lost everything; and this because they broke not with that beginning of sensual desire and pleasure and kept not themselves in solitude for God.

6. Upon this road we must ever journey in order to attain our goal; which means that we must ever be mortifying our desires and not indulging them; and if they are not all completely mortified we shall not completely attain. For even as a log of wood may fail to be transformed in the fire because a single degree of heat is wanting to it, even so the soul will not be transformed in God if it have but one imperfection, although it be something less than voluntary desire; for, as we shall say hereafter concerning the night of faith, the soul has only one will, and that will, if it be embarrassed by aught and set upon by aught, is not free, solitary, and pure, as is necessary for Divine transformation.

7. Of this that has been said we have a figure in the Book of the Judges, where it is related that the angel came to the children of Israel and said to them that, because they had not destroyed that forward people, but had made a league with some of them, they would therefore be left among them as enemies, that they might be to them an occasion of stumbling and perdition.<sup>187</sup> And just so does God deal with certain souls: though He has taken them out of the world, and slain the giants, their sins, and destroyed the multitude of their enemies, which are the occasions of sin that they encountered in the world, solely that they may enter this Promised Land of Divine union

---

<sup>182</sup>[*cordeles*: a stronger word than that used above (*hilo*), which, if the context would permit, might better be translated 'string' -- its equivalent in modern speech. Below, *hilo* is translated 'thread'.]

<sup>183</sup>[*Hilo*, rendered 'thread,' as explained in n. 4 above, can also be taken in the stronger sense of 'cord'.]

<sup>184</sup>St. Matthew xii, 30.

<sup>185</sup>Ecclesiasticus xix, 1.

<sup>186</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the fire is increased by a single spark.'] Ecclesiasticus xi, 34 [A.V., xi, 32].

<sup>187</sup>Judges ii, 3.

with greater liberty, yet they harbour friendship and make alliance with the insignificant peoples<sup>188</sup> -- that is, with imperfections -- and mortify them not completely; therefore Our Lord is angry, and allows them to fall into their desires and go from bad to worse.

8. In the Book of Josue, again, we have a figure of what has just been said -- where we read that God commanded Josue, at the time that he had to enter into possession of the Promised Land, to destroy all things that were in the city of Jericho, in such wise as to leave therein nothing alive, man or woman, young or old, and to slay all the beasts, and to take naught, neither to covet aught, of all the spoils.<sup>189</sup> This He said that we may understand how, if a man is to enter this Divine union, all that lives in his soul must die, both little and much, small and great, and that the soul must be without desire for all this, and detached from it, even as though it existed not for the soul, neither the soul for it. This Saint Paul teaches us clearly in his epistle *ad Corinthios*, saying: 'This I say to you, brethren, that the time is short; it remains, and it behoves you, that they that have wives should be as if they had none; and they that weep for the things of this world, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as if they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as if they used it not.'<sup>190</sup> This the Apostle says to us in order to teach us how complete must be the detachment of our soul from all things if it is to journey to God.

## CHAPTER XII

*Which treats of the answer to another question, explaining what the desires are that suffice to cause the evils aforementioned in the soul.*

WE might write at greater length upon this matter of the night of sense, saying all that there is to say concerning the harm which is caused by the desires, not only in the ways aforementioned, but in many others. But for our purpose that which has been said suffices; for we believe we have made it clear in what way the mortification of these desires is called night, and how it behoves us to enter this night in order to journey to God. The only thing that remains, before we treat of the manner of entrance therein, in order to bring this part to a close, is a question concerning what has been said which might occur to the reader.

2. It may first be asked if any desire can be sufficient to work and produce in the soul the two evils aforementioned -- namely, the privative, which consists in depriving the soul of the grace of God, and the positive, which consists in producing within it the five serious evils whereof we have spoken. Secondly, it may be asked if any desire, however slight it be and of whatever kind, suffices to produce all these together, or if some desires produce some and others produce others. If, for example, some produce torment; others, weariness; others, darkness, etc.

3. Answering this question, I say, first of all, that with respect to the privative evil - which consists in the soul's being deprived of God -- this is wrought wholly, and can

---

<sup>188</sup>[The original phrase (*gente menuda*) means 'little folk.' It is used of children and sometimes also of insects and other small creatures. There is a marked antithesis between the 'giants,' or sins, and the 'little folk,' or imperfections.]

<sup>189</sup>Josue vi, 21.

<sup>190</sup>1 Corinthians vii, 29-31.

only be wrought, by the voluntary desires, which are of the matter of mortal sin; for they deprive the soul of grace in this life, and of glory, which is the possession of God, in the next. In the second place, I say that both those desires which are of the matter of mortal sin, and the voluntary desires, which are of the matter of venial sin, and those that are of the matter of imperfection, are each sufficient to produce in the soul all these positive evils together; the which evils, although in a certain way they are privative, we here call positive, since they correspond to a turning towards the creature, even as the privative evils correspond to a turning away from God. But there is this difference, that the desires which are of mortal sin produce total blindness, torment, impurity, weakness, etc. Those others, however, which are of the matter of venial sin or imperfection, produce not these evils in a complete and supreme degree, since they deprive not the soul of grace, upon the loss of which depends the possession of them, since the death of the soul is their life; but they produce them in the soul remissly, proportionately to the remission of grace which these desires produce in the soul.<sup>191</sup> So that desire which most weakens grace will produce the most abundant torment, blindness and defilement.

4. It should be noted, however, that, although each desire produces all these evils, which we here term positive, there are some which, principally and directly, produce some of them, and others which produce others, and the remainder are produced consequently upon these. For, although it is true that one sensual desire produces all these evils, yet its principal and proper effect is the defilement of soul and body. And, although one avaricious desire produces them all, its principal and direct result is to produce misery. And, although similarly one vainglorious desire produces them all, its principal and direct result is to produce darkness and blindness. And, although one gluttonous desire produces them all, its principal result is to produce lukewarmness in virtue. And even so is it with the rest.

5. And the reason why any act of voluntary desire produces in the soul all these effects together lies in the direct contrariety which exists between them and all the acts of virtue which produce the contrary effects in the soul. For, even as an act of virtue produces and begets in the soul sweetness, peace, consolation, light, cleanness and fortitude altogether, even so an unruly desire causes torment, fatigue, weariness, blindness and weakness. All the virtues grow through the practice of any one of them, and all the vices grow through the practice of any one of them likewise, and the remnants<sup>192</sup> of each grow in the soul. And although all these evils are not evident at the moment when the desire is indulged, since the resulting pleasure gives no occasion for them, yet the evil remnants which they leave are clearly perceived, whether before or afterwards. This is very well illustrated by that book which the angel commanded Saint John to eat, in the Apocalypse, the which book was sweetness to his mouth, and in his belly bitterness.<sup>193</sup> For the desire, when it is carried into effect, is sweet and appears to be good, but its bitter taste is felt afterwards; the truth of this can be clearly proved by anyone who allows himself to be led away by it. Yet I am not ignorant that there are some men so blind and insensible as not to feel this, for, as they do not walk in God, they are unable to perceive that which hinders them from approaching Him.

6. I am not writing here of the other natural desires which are not voluntary, and

---

<sup>191</sup>[The word here translated 'remissness' is rendered 'remission' in the text, where it seems to have a slightly different meaning.]

<sup>192</sup>[The word translated 'remnants' also means 'after-taste.']

<sup>193</sup>Apocalypse x, 9.

of thoughts that go not beyond the first movements, and other temptations to which the soul is not consenting; for these produce in the soul none of the evils aforementioned. For, although a person who suffers from them may think that the passion and disturbance which they then produce in him are defiling and blinding him, this is not the case; rather they are bringing him the opposite advantages. For, in so far as he resists them, he gains fortitude, purity, light and consolation, and many blessings, even as Our Lord said to Saint Paul: That virtue was made perfect in weakness.<sup>194</sup> But the voluntary desires work all the evils aforementioned, and more. Wherefore the principal care of spiritual masters is to mortify their disciples immediately with respect to any desire soever, by causing them to remain without the objects of their desires, in order to free them from such great misery.

### CHAPTER XIII

*Wherein is described the manner and way which the soul must follow in order to enter this night of sense.*

IT now remains for me to give certain counsels whereby the soul may know how to enter this night of sense and may be able so to do. To this end it must be known that the soul habitually enters this night of sense in two ways: the one is active; the other passive. The active way consists in that which the soul can do, and does, of itself, in order to enter therein, whereof we shall now treat in the counsels which follow. The passive way is that wherein the soul does nothing, and God works in it, and it remains, as it were, patient. Of this we shall treat in the fourth book, where we shall be treating of beginners. And because there, with the Divine favour, we shall give many counsels to beginners, according to the many imperfections which they are apt to have while on this road, I shall not spend time in giving many here. And this, too, because it belongs not to this place to give them, as at present we are treating only of the reasons for which this journey is called a night, and of what kind it is, and how many parts it has. But, as it seems that it would be incomplete, and less profitable than it should be, if we gave no help or counsel here for walking in this night of desires, I have thought well to set down briefly here the way which is to be followed: and I shall do the same at the end of each of the next two parts, or causes, of this night, whereof, with the help of the Lord, I have to treat.

2. These counsels for the conquering of the desires, which now follow, albeit brief and few, I believe to be as profitable and efficacious as they are concise; so that one who sincerely desires to practice them will need no others, but will find them all included in these.

3. First, let him have an habitual desire<sup>195</sup> to imitate Christ in everything that he does, conforming himself to His life; upon which life he must meditate so that he may know how to imitate it, and to behave in all things as Christ would behave.

4. Secondly, in order that he may be able to do this well, every pleasure that

---

<sup>194</sup>2 Corinthians xii, 9. ['Virtue' had often, in the author's day, much of the meaning of the modern word 'strength.']

<sup>195</sup>[The word used for desire is *apetito*, which has been used in the past chapters for desires of sense (cf. chap. I, above).]

presents itself to the senses, if it be not purely for the honour and glory of God, must be renounced and completely rejected for the love of Jesus Christ, Who in this life had no other pleasure, neither desired any, than to do the will of His Father, which He called His meat and food.<sup>196</sup> I take this example. If there present itself to a man the pleasure of listening to things that tend not to the service and honour of God, let him not desire that pleasure, nor desire to listen to them; and if there present itself the pleasure of looking at things that help him not Godward, let him not desire the pleasure or look at these things; and if in conversation or in aught else soever such pleasure present itself, let him act likewise. And similarly with respect to all the senses, in so far as he can fairly avoid the pleasure in question; if he cannot, it suffices that, although these things may be present to his senses, he desires not to have this pleasure. And in this wise he will be able to mortify and void his senses of such pleasure, as though they were in darkness. If he takes care to do this, he will soon reap great profit.

5. For the mortifying and calming of the four natural passions, which are joy, hope, fear and grief, from the concord and pacification whereof come these and other blessings, the counsels here following are of the greatest help, and of great merit, and the source of great virtues.

6. Strive always to prefer, not that which is easiest, but that which is most difficult;

Not that which is most delectable, but that which is most unpleasing;

Not that which gives most pleasure, but rather that which gives least;

Not that which is restful, but that which is wearisome;

Not that which is consolation, but rather that which is disconsolateness;

Not that which is greatest, but that which is least;

Not that which is loftiest and most precious, but that which is lowest and most despised;

Not that which is<sup>197</sup> a desire for anything, but that which is a desire for nothing;

Strive to go about seeking not the best of temporal things, but the worst.

Strive thus to desire to enter into complete detachment and emptiness and poverty, with respect to everything that is in the world, for Christ's sake.

7. And it is meet that the soul embrace these acts with all its heart and strive to subdue its will thereto. For, if it perform them with its heart, it will very quickly come to find in them great delight and consolation, and to act with order and discretion.

8. These things that have been said, if they be faithfully put into practice, are quite sufficient for entrance into the night of sense; but, for greater completeness, we shall describe another kind of exercise which teaches us to mortify the concupiscence of the flesh and the concupiscence of the eyes, and the pride of life, which, says Saint John,<sup>198</sup> are the things that reign in the world, from which all the other desires proceed.

9. First, let the soul strive to work in its own despite, and desire all to do so. Secondly, let it strive to speak in its own despite and desire all to do so. Third, let it strive to think humbly of itself, in its own despite, and desire all to do so.

10. To conclude these counsels and rules, it will be fitting to set down here those lines which are written in the Ascent of the Mount, which is the figure that is at the beginning of this book; the which lines are instructions for ascending to it, and thus

---

<sup>196</sup>[St. John iv, 34.]

<sup>197</sup>*Lit.*, 'Not that which is to desire anything, etc.']

<sup>198</sup>[1 St. John ii, 16.]

reaching the summit of union. For, although it is true that that which is there spoken of is spiritual and interior, there is reference likewise to the spirit of imperfection according to sensual and exterior things, as may be seen by the two roads which are on either side of the path of perfection. It is in this way and according to this sense that we shall understand them here; that is to say, according to that which is sensual. Afterwards, in the second part of this night, they will be understood according to that which is spiritual.<sup>199</sup>

11. The lines are these:

In order to arrive at having pleasure in everything,  
Desire to have pleasure in nothing.  
In order to arrive at possessing everything,  
Desire to possess nothing.  
In order to arrive at being everything,  
Desire to be nothing.  
In order to arrive at knowing everything,  
Desire to know nothing.<sup>200</sup>  
In order to arrive at that wherein thou hast no pleasure,  
Thou must go by a way wherein thou hast no pleasure.  
In order to arrive at that which thou knowest not,  
Thou must go by a way that thou knowest not.  
In order to arrive at that which thou possessest not,  
Thou must go by a way that thou possessest not.  
In order to arrive at that which thou art not,  
Thou must go through that which thou art not.  
12. When thy mind dwells upon anything,  
Thou art ceasing to cast thyself upon the All.  
For, in order to pass from the all to the All,  
Thou hast to deny thyself wholly<sup>201</sup> in all.  
And, when thou comest to possess it wholly,  
Thou must possess it without desiring anything.  
For, if thou wilt have anything in having all,<sup>202</sup>  
Thou hast not thy treasure purely in God.

13. In this detachment the spiritual soul finds its quiet and repose; for, since it covets nothing, nothing wearies it when it is lifted up, and nothing oppresses it when it is cast down, because it is in the centre of its humility; but when it covets anything, at that very moment it becomes wearied.

## CHAPTER XIV

---

<sup>199</sup>The Saint does not, however, allude to these lines again. The order followed below is that of Alc., which differs somewhat from that followed in the diagram.

<sup>200</sup>[This line, like ll. 6, 8 of the paragraph, reads more literally: 'Desire not to possess (be, know) anything in anything.' It is more emphatic than l. 2.]

<sup>201</sup>[There is a repetition here which could only be indicated by translating 'all-ly.' So, too, in the next couplet.]

<sup>202</sup>[*Lit.* 'anything in all.']



*Wherein is expounded the second line of the stanza.*

**Kindled in love with yearnings.**

NOW that we have expounded the first line of this stanza, which treats of the night of sense, explaining what this night of sense is, and why it is called night; and now that we have likewise described the order and manner which are to be followed for a soul to enter therein actively, the next thing to be treated in due sequence is its properties and effects, which are wonderful, and are described in the next lines of the stanza aforementioned, upon which I will briefly touch for the sake of expounding the said lines, as I promised in the Prologue;<sup>203</sup> and I will then pass on at once to the second book, treating of the other part of this night, which is the spiritual.

2. The soul, then, says that, 'kindled in love with yearnings,' it passed through this dark night of sense and came out thence to the union of the Beloved. For, in order to conquer all the desires and to deny itself the pleasures which it has in everything, and for which its love and affection are wont to enkindle the will that it may enjoy them, it would need to experience another and a greater enkindling by an other and a better love, which is that of its Spouse; to the end that, having its pleasure set upon Him and deriving from Him its strength, it should have courage and constancy to deny itself all other things with ease. And, in order to conquer the strength of the desires of sense, it would need, not only to have love for its Spouse, but also to be enkindled by love and to have yearnings. For it comes to pass, and so it is, that with such yearnings of desire the sensual nature is moved and attracted toward sensual things, so that, if the spiritual part be not enkindled with other and greater yearnings for that which is spiritual, it will be unable to throw off the yoke of nature<sup>204</sup> or to enter this night of sense, neither will it have courage to remain in darkness as to all things, depriving itself of desire for them all.

3. And the nature and all the varieties of these yearnings of love which souls experience in the early stages of this road to union; and the diligent means and contrivances which they employ in order to leave their house, which is self-will, during the night of the mortification of their senses; and how easy, and even sweet and delectable, these yearnings for the Spouse make all the trials and perils of this night to appear to them, this is not the place to describe, neither is such description possible; for it is better to know and meditate upon these things than to write of them. And so we shall pass on to expound the remaining lines in the next chapter.

CHAPTER XV

*Wherein are expounded the remaining lines of the aforementioned stanza.*

**. . . oh, happy chance! --  
I went forth without being observed, My house being now at rest.**

---

<sup>203</sup>This confirms our point (Bk. I, chap. ii, ¶ 6, above) that the Saint considers the Argument as part of the Prologue.

<sup>204</sup>*Lit.*, 'to conquer the natural yoke.']

THESE lines take as a metaphor the miserable estate of captivity, a man's deliverance from which, when none of the gaolers' hinder his release, he considers a 'happy chance.' For the soul, on account of<sup>205</sup> original sin, is truly as it were a captive in this mortal body, subject to the passions and desires of nature, from bondage and subjection to which it considers its having gone forth without being observed as a 'happy chance' -- having gone forth, that is, without being impeded or engulfed<sup>206</sup> by any of them.

2. For to this end the soul profited by going forth upon a 'dark night' -- that is, in the privation of all pleasures and mortification of all desires, after the manner whereof we have spoken. And by its 'house being now at rest' is meant the sensual part, which is the house of all the desires, and is now at rest because they have all been overcome and lulled to sleep. For until the desires are lulled to sleep through the mortification of the sensual nature, and until at last the sensual nature itself is at rest from them, so that they make not war upon the spirit, the soul goes not forth to true liberty and to the fruition of union with its Beloved.

## END OF THE FIRST BOOK

---

<sup>205</sup>[*Lit.*, 'after.']

<sup>206</sup>[*Lit.*, 'comprehended.']

## BOOK THE SECOND

### OF THE 'ASCENT OF MT. CARMEL'

*Wherein is treated the proximate means of ascending to union with God, which is faith; and wherein therefore is described the second part of this night, which, as we said, belongs to the spirit, and is contained in the second stanza, which is as follows.*

#### STANZA THE SECOND

##### CHAPTER I

**In darkness and secure, By the secret ladder, disguised -- oh, happy chance! --**

**In darkness and in concealment, My house being now at rest.**

IN this second stanza the soul sings of the happy chance which it experienced in stripping the spirit of all spiritual imperfections and desires for the possession of spiritual things. This was a much greater happiness to, by reason of the greater difficulty that there is in putting to rest this house of the spiritual part, and of being able to enter this interior darkness, which is spiritual detachment from all things, whether sensual or spiritual, and leaning on pure faith alone and an ascent thereby to God. The soul here calls this a 'ladder,' and 'secret,' because all the rungs and parts of it<sup>207</sup> are secret and hidden from all sense and understanding. And thus the soul has remained in darkness as to all light of sense and understanding, going forth beyond all limits of nature and reason in order to ascend by this Divine ladder of faith, which attains<sup>208</sup> and penetrates even to the heights<sup>209</sup> of God. The soul says that it was travelling 'disguised,' because the garments and vesture which it wears and its natural condition are changed into the Divine, as it ascends by faith. And it was because of this disguise that it was not recognized or impeded, either by time or by reason or by the devil; for none of these things can harm one that journeys in faith. And not only so, but the soul travels in such wise concealed and hidden and is so far from all the deceits of the devil that in truth it journeys (as it also says here) 'in darkness and in concealment' -- that is to say, hidden from the devil, to whom the light of faith is more than darkness.

2. And thus the soul that journeys through this night, we may say, journeys in concealment and in hiding from the devil, as will be more clearly seen hereafter. Wherefore the soul says that it went forth 'in darkness and secure'; for one that has such happiness as to be able to journey through the darkness of faith, taking faith for his guide, like to one that is blind,<sup>210</sup> and leaving behind all natural imaginings and spiritual reasonings, journeys very securely, as we have said. And so the soul says furthermore that it went forth through this spiritual night, its 'house being now at rest' -- that is to say,

---

<sup>207</sup>[*Lit.*, 'all the steps and articles that it has.']

<sup>208</sup>[*Lit.*, 'climbs': the verb (*escala*) is identical with the noun 'ladder' (*escala*).]

<sup>209</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to the depths.']

<sup>210</sup>[The literal translation is shorter, viz. 'taking faith for a blind man's guide.']

its spiritual and rational parts. When, therefore, the soul attains to union which is of God, its natural faculties are at rest, as are likewise its impulses and yearnings of the senses, in its spiritual part. For this cause the soul says not here that it went forth with yearnings, as in the first night of sense. For, in order to journey in the night of sense, and to strip itself of that which is of sense, it needed yearnings of sense-love so that it might go forth perfectly; but, in order to put to rest the house of its spirit, it needs no more than denial<sup>211</sup> of all faculties and pleasures and desires of the spirit in pure faith. This attained, the soul is united with the Beloved in a union of simplicity and purity and love and similitude.

3. And it must be remembered that the first stanza, speaking of the sensual part, says that the soul went forth upon 'a dark night,' and here, speaking of the spiritual part, it says that it went forth 'in darkness.' For the darkness of the spiritual part is by far the greater, even as darkness is a greater obscurity than that of night. For, however dark a night may be, something can always be seen, but in true darkness nothing can be seen; and thus in the night of sense there still remains some light, for the understanding and reason remain, and are not blinded. But this spiritual night, which is faith, deprives the soul of everything, both as to understanding and as to sense. And for this cause the soul in this night says that it was journeying 'in darkness and secure,' which it said not in the other. For, the less the soul works with its own ability, the more securely it journeys, because it journeys more in faith. And this will be expounded at length in the course of this second book, wherein it will be necessary for the devout reader to proceed attentively, because there will be said herein things of great importance to the person that is truly spiritual.<sup>212</sup> And, although they are somewhat obscure, some of them will pave the way to others, so that I believe they will all be quite clearly understood.

## CHAPTER II

*Which begins to treat of the second part or cause of this night, which is faith. Proves by two arguments how it is darker than the first and than the third.*

WE now go on to treat of the second part of this night, which is faith; this is the wondrous means which, as we said, leads to the goal, which is God, Who, as we said,<sup>213</sup> is also to the soul, naturally, the third cause or part of this night. For faith, which is the means,<sup>214</sup> is compared with midnight. And thus we may say that it is darker for the soul either than the first part or, in a way, than the third; for the first part, which is that of sense, is compared to the beginning of night, or the time when sensible objects can no longer be seen, and thus it is not so far removed from light as is midnight. The third part, which is the period preceding the dawn, is quite close to the light of day, and it, too, therefore, is not so dark as midnight; for it is now close to the enlightenment and

---

<sup>211</sup>[*Lit.*, 'negation.'] This is the reading of Alc. 'Affirmation' is found in A, B, C, D, e.p. Though the two words are antithetical, they express the same underlying concept. [The affirmation, or establishment, of all the powers and desires of the spirit upon pure faith, so that they may be ruled by pure faith alone, is equivalent to the denial, or negation, of those powers and desires in so far as they are not ruled by pure faith.]

<sup>212</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to true spirit.']

<sup>213</sup>[I, ii, above.]

<sup>214</sup>[Cf. I, ii, above.]

illumination of the light of day, which is compared with God. For, although it is true, if we speak after a natural manner, that God is as dark a night to the soul as is faith, still, when these three parts of the night are over, which are naturally night to the soul, God begins to illumine the soul by supernatural means with the ray of His Divine light; which is the beginning of the perfect union that follows, when the third night is past, and it can thus be said to be less dark.

2. It is likewise darker than the first night, for this belongs to the lower part of man, which is the sensual part, and, consequently, the more exterior; and this second part, which is of faith, belongs to the higher part of man, which is the rational part, and, in consequence, more interior and more obscure, since it deprives it of the light of reason, or, to speak more clearly, blinds it;<sup>215</sup> and thus it is aptly compared to midnight, which is the depth of night and the darkest part thereof.

3. We have now to prove how this second part, which is faith, is night to the spirit, even as the first part is night to sense. And we shall then also describe the things that are contrary to it, and how the soul must prepare itself actively to enter it. For, concerning the passive part, which is that which God works in it, when He brings it into that night, we shall speak in its place, which I intend shall be the third book.

### CHAPTER III

*How faith is dark night to the soul. This is proved with arguments and quotations and figures from Scripture.*

FAITH, say the theologians, is a habit of the soul, certain and obscure. And the reason for its being an obscure habit is that it makes us believe truths revealed by God Himself, which transcend all natural light, and exceed all human understanding, beyond all proportion. Hence it follows that, for the soul, this excessive light of faith which is given to it is thick darkness, for it overwhelms greater things and does away with small things, even as the light of the sun overwhelms all other lights whatsoever, so that when it shines and disables our visual faculty they appear not to be lights at all. So that it blinds it and deprives it of the sight that has been given to it, inasmuch as its light is great beyond all proportion and transcends the faculty of vision. Even so the light of faith, by its excessive greatness, oppresses and disables that of the understanding; for the latter,

---

<sup>215</sup>This was another of the propositions which were cited by those who denounced the writings of St. John of the Cross to the Holy Office. It is interpretable, nevertheless, in a sense that is perfectly true and completely in conformity with Catholic doctrine. The Saint does not, in these words, affirm that faith destroys nature or quenches the light of human reason (St. Thomas, *Summa*, Pt. 1, q. 1, a. 8, *et alibi*); what he endeavors to show is that the coming of knowledge through faith excludes a simultaneous coming of natural knowledge through reason. It is only in this way that, in the act of faith, the soul is deprived of the light of reason, and left, as it were, in blindness, so that it may be raised to another nobler and sublimer kind of knowledge, which, far from destroying reason, gives it dignity and perfection. Philosophy teaches that the proper and connatural object of the understanding, in this life, is things visible, material and corporeal. By his nature, man inclines to knowledge of this kind, but cannot lay claim to such knowledge as regards the things which belong to faith. For, to quote a famous verse of Scripture: *Fides est sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparientium* (Hebrews xi, 1 ). This line of thought is not confined to St. John of the Cross, but is followed by all the mystics and is completely in agreement with theological doctrine. Cf. *Respuesta* [Reply] of P. Basilio Ponce de León and *Dilucidatio*, Pt. II, Chap. ii, and also the following chapter in this present book.

of its own power, extends only to natural knowledge, although it has a faculty<sup>216</sup> for the supernatural, whenever Our Lord is pleased to give it supernatural activity.

2. Wherefore a man can know nothing by himself, save after a natural manner,<sup>217</sup> which is only that which he attains by means of the senses. For this cause he must have the phantasms and the forms of objects present in themselves and in their likenesses; otherwise it cannot be, for, as philosophers say: *Ab objecto et potentia paritur notitia*. That is: From the object that is present and from the faculty, knowledge is born in the soul. Wherefore, if one should speak to a man of things which he has never been able to understand, and whose likeness he has never seen, he would have no more illumination from them whatever than if naught had been said of them to him. I take an example. If one should say to a man that on a certain island there is an animal which he has never seen, and give him no idea of the likeness of that animal, that he may compare it with others that he has seen, he will have no more knowledge of it, or idea of its form, than he had before, however much is being said to him about it. And this will be better understood by another and a more apt example. If one should describe to a man that was born blind, and has never seen any colour, what is meant by a white colour or by a yellow, he would understand it but indifferently, however fully one might describe it to him; for, as he has never seen such colours or anything like them by which he may judge them, only their names would remain with him; for these he would be able to comprehend through the ear, but not their forms or figures, since he has never seen them.

3. Even so is faith with respect to the soul; it tells us of things which we have never seen or understood, nor have we seen or understood aught that resembles them, since there is naught that resembles them at all. And thus we have no light of natural knowledge concerning them, since that which we are told of them bears no relation to any sense of ours; we know it by the ear alone, believing that which we are taught, bringing our natural light into subjection and treating it as if it were not.<sup>218</sup> For, as Saint Paul says, *Fides ex auditu*.<sup>219</sup> As though he were to say: Faith is not knowledge which enters by any of the senses, but is only the consent given by the soul to that which enters through the ear.

4. And faith far transcends even that which is indicated by the examples given above. For not only does it give no information and knowledge, but, as we have said, it deprives us of all other information and knowledge, and blinds us to them, so that they cannot judge it well. For other knowledge can be acquired by the light of the

---

<sup>216</sup>E .p.: 'an obediential faculty' [*potencia obediencial*]: this phrase is borrowed from the Schoolmen. Among the various divisions of the faculty are two, natural and obediential. The first is that which is directed towards an act within the sphere of nature, such as the cooling action of water and the heating action of fire; the second is directed towards an act which exceeds these powers, brought about by God, Who is outside the laws of nature and can therefore work outside the natural domain. This obediential faculty (called also 'receptive' or 'passive') frequently figures in mystical theology, since it is this that disposes the faculties of the soul for the supernatural reception of the gifts of grace, all of which exceed natural capacity.

<sup>217</sup>E.p.: 'a natural manner which has its beginning in the senses.' Here the Saint expounds a principle of scholastic philosophy summarized in the axiom: *Nihil est in intellectu quin prius non fuerit in sensu*. This principle, like many other great philosophical questions, has continually been debated. St. John of the Cross will be found as a rule to follow the philosophy most favored by the Church and is always rigidly orthodox.

<sup>218</sup>[*Lit.*, 'subjecting and blinding our natural light.']

<sup>219</sup>Romans x, 17.

understanding; but the knowledge that is of faith is acquired without the illumination of the understanding, which is rejected for faith; and in its own light, if that light be not darkened, it is lost. Wherefore Isaias said: *Si non credideritis, non intelligetis*.<sup>220</sup> That is: If ye believe not, ye shall not understand. It is clear, then, that faith is dark night for the soul, and it is in this way that it gives it light; and the more the soul is darkened, the greater is the light that comes to it. For it is by blinding that it gives light, according to this saying of Isaias. For if ye believe not, ye shall not (he says) have light.<sup>221</sup> And thus faith was foreshadowed by that cloud which divided the children of Israel and the Egyptians when the former were about to enter the Red Sea, whereof Scripture says: *Erat nubes tenebrosa, et illuminans noctem*.<sup>222</sup> This is to say that that cloud was full of darkness and gave light to the night.

5. A wondrous thing it is that, though it was dark, it should give light to the night. This was said to show that faith, which is a black and dark cloud to the soul (and likewise is night, since in the presence of faith the soul is deprived of its natural light and is blinded), can with its darkness give light and illumination to the darkness of the soul, for it was fitting that the disciples should thus be like the master. For man, who is in darkness, could not fittingly be enlightened save by other darkness, even as David teaches us, saying: *Dies diei eructat verbum et nox nocti indicat scientiam*.<sup>223</sup> Which signifies: Day unto day uttereth and aboundeth in speech, and night unto night showeth knowledge. Which, to speak more clearly, signifies: The day, which is God in bliss, where it is day to the blessed angels and souls who are now day, communicates and reveals to them the Word, which is His Son, that they may know Him and enjoy Him. And the night, which is faith in the Church Militant, where it is still night, shows knowledge is night to the Church, and consequently to every soul, which knowledge is night to it, since it is without clear beatific wisdom; and, in the presence of faith, it is blind as to its natural light.

6. So that which is to be inferred from this that faith, because it is dark night, gives light to the soul, which is in darkness, that there may come to be fulfilled that which David likewise says to this purpose, in these words: *Et nox illuminatio mea in deliciis meis*.<sup>224</sup> Which signifies: the night will be illumination in my delights. Which is as much as to say: In the delights of my pure contemplation and union with God, the night of faith shall be my guide. Wherein he gives it clearly to be understood that the soul must be in darkness in order to have light for this road.

## CHAPTER IV

*Treats in general of how the soul likewise must be in darkness, in so far as this rests with itself, to the end that it may be effectively guided by faith to the highest contemplation.*

---

<sup>220</sup>Isaias vii, 9. So Alc. The passage seems to be taken from the Septuagint. [The Vulgate has *non permanebitis*.]

<sup>221</sup>[*Lit.*, 'If ye believe not, that is, ye shall not have light.']

<sup>222</sup>Exodus xiv, 20.

<sup>223</sup>Psalm xviii, 3 [A.V., xix, 2].

<sup>224</sup>Psalm cxxxviii, 11 [A.V., cxxxix, 11].

IT is now, I think, becoming clear how faith is dark night to the soul, and how the soul likewise must be dark, or in darkness as to its own light so that it may allow itself to be guided by faith to this high goal of union. But, in order that the soul may be able to do this, it will now be well to continue describing, in somewhat greater detail, this darkness which it must have, in order that it may enter into this abyss of faith. And thus in this chapter I shall speak of it in a general way; and hereafter, with the Divine favour, I shall continue to describe more minutely the way in which the soul is to conduct itself that it may neither stray therein nor impede this guide.

2. I say, then, that the soul, in order to be effectively guided to this state by faith, must not only be in darkness with respect to that part that concerns the creatures and temporal things, which is the sensual and the lower part (whereof we have already treated), but that likewise it must be blinded and darkened according to the part which has respect to God and to spiritual things, which is the rational and higher part, whereof we are now treating. For, in order that one may attain supernatural transformation, it is clear that he must be plunged into darkness and carried far away from all contained in his nature that is sensual and rational. For the word supernatural means that which soars above the natural self; the natural self, therefore, remains beneath it. For, although this transformation and union is something that cannot be comprehended by human ability and sense, the soul must completely and voluntarily void itself of all that can enter into it, whether from above or from below -- I mean according to the affection and will -- so far as this rests with itself. For who shall prevent God from doing that which He will in the soul that is resigned, annihilated and detached? But the soul must be voided of all such things as can enter its capacity, so that, however many supernatural experiences it may have, it will ever remain as it were detached from them and in darkness. It must be like to a blind man, leaning upon dark faith, taking it for guide and light, and leaning upon none of the things that he understands, experiences, feels and imagines. For all these are darkness, which will cause him to stray; and faith is above all that he understands and experiences and feels and imagines. And, if he be not blinded as to this, and remain not in total darkness, he attains not to that which is greater -- namely, that which is taught by faith.

3. A blind man, if he be not quite blind, refuses to be led by a guide; and, since he sees a little, he thinks it better to go in whatever happens to be the direction which he can distinguish, because he sees none better; and thus he can lead astray a guide who sees more than he, for after all it is for him to say where he shall go rather than for the guide. In the same way a soul may lean upon any knowledge of its own, or any feeling or experience of God, yet, however great this may be, it is very little and far different from what God is; and, in going along this road, a soul is easily led astray, or brought to a standstill, because it will not remain in faith like one that is blind, and faith is its true guide.

4. It is this that was meant by Saint Paul when he said: *Accedentem ad Deum oportet credere quod est.*<sup>225</sup> Which signifies: He that would journey towards union with God must needs believe in His Being. As though he had said: He that would attain to being joined in a union with God must not walk by understanding, neither lean upon experience or feeling or imagination, but he must believe in His being, which is not perceptible to the understanding, neither to the desire nor to the imagination nor to any other sense, neither can it be known in this life at all. Yea, in this life, the highest thing

---

<sup>225</sup>Hebrews xi, 6.



that can be felt and experienced concerning God is infinitely remote from God and from the pure possession of Him. Isaias and Saint Paul say: *Nec oculus vidit, nec auris audivit, nec in cor hominis ascendit, qua praeeparavit Deus iis, qui diligunt illum.*<sup>226</sup> Which signifies: That which God hath prepared for them that love Him neither eye hath seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart or thought of man. So, however much the soul aspires to be perfectly united through grace in this life with that to which it will be united through glory in the next (which, as Saint Paul here says, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man in the flesh), it is clear that, in order perfectly to attain to union in this life through grace and through love, a soul must be in darkness with respect to all that can enter through the eye, and to all that can be received through the ear, and can be imagined with the fancy, and understood with the heart, which here signifies the soul. And thus a soul is greatly impeded from reaching this high estate of union with God when it clings to any understanding or feeling or imagination or appearance or will or manner of its own, or to any other act or to anything of its own, and cannot detach and strip itself of all these. For, as we say, the goal which it seeks lies beyond all this, yea, beyond even the highest thing that can be known or experienced; and thus a soul must pass beyond everything to unknowing.

5. Wherefore, upon this road, to enter upon the road is to leave the road; or, to express it better, it is to pass on to the goal and to leave one's own way,<sup>227</sup> and to enter upon that which has no way, which is God. For the soul that attains to this state has no longer any ways or methods, still less is it attached to ways and methods, or is capable of being attached to them. I mean ways of understanding, or of perception, or of feeling. Nevertheless it has within itself all ways, after the way of one that possesses nothing, yet possesses all things.<sup>228</sup> For, if it have courage to pass beyond its natural limitations, both interiorly and exteriorly, it enters within the limits of the supernatural, which has no way, yet in substance has all ways. Hence for the soul to arrive at these limits is for it to leave these limits, in each case going forth out of itself a great way, from this lowly state to that which is high above all others.

6. Wherefore, passing beyond all that can be known and understood, both spiritually and naturally, the soul will desire with all desire to come to that which in this life cannot be known, neither can enter into its heart. And, leaving behind all that it experiences and feels, both temporally and spiritually, and all that it is able to experience and feel in this life, it will desire with all desire to come to that which surpasses all feeling and experience. And, in order to be free and void to that end, it must in no wise lay hold upon that which it receives, either spiritually or sensually, within itself<sup>229</sup> (as we shall explain presently, when we treat this in detail), considering it all to be of much less account. For the more emphasis the soul lays upon what it understands, experiences and imagines, and the more it esteems this, whether it be spiritual or no, the more it loses of the supreme good, and the more it is hindered from attaining thereto. And the less it thinks of what it may have, however much this be, in comparison with the highest good, the more it dwells upon that good and esteems it,

---

<sup>226</sup>Isaias lxiv, 4; 1 Corinthians ii, 9.

<sup>227</sup>[The word translated 'way' is *modo*, which, in the language of scholastic philosophy, would rather be translated 'mode.']

<sup>228</sup>[2 Corinthians vi, 10.]

<sup>229</sup>[*Lit.*, 'either spiritually or sensually, in its soul.']

and, consequently, the more nearly it approaches it. And in this wise the soul approaches a great way towards union, in darkness, by means of faith, which is likewise dark, and in this wise faith wondrously illumines it. It is certain that, if the soul should desire to see, it would be in darkness much more quickly, with respect to God, than would one who opens his eyes to look upon the great brightness of the sun.

7. Wherefore, by blinding itself in its faculties upon this road, the soul will see the light, even as the Saviour says in the Gospel, in this wise: *In iudicium veni in hunc mundum: ut qui non vident, videant, et qui vident, caeci fiant.*<sup>230</sup> That is: I am come into this world for judgment; that they which see not may see, and that they which see may become blind. This, as it will be supposed, is to be understood of this spiritual road, where the soul that is in darkness, and is blinded as regards all its natural and proper lights, will see supernaturally; and the soul that would depend upon any light of its own will become the blinder and will halt upon the road to union.

8. And, that we may proceed with less confusion, I think it will be necessary to describe, in the following chapter, the nature of this that we call union of the soul with God; for, when this is understood, that which we shall say hereafter will become much clearer. And so I think the treatment of this union comes well at this point, as in its proper place. For, although the thread of that which we are expounding is interrupted thereby, this is not done without a reason, since it serves to illustrate in this place the very thing that is being described. The chapter which follows, then, will be a parenthetical one, placed, as it were, between the two terms of an enthymeme, since we shall afterwards have to treat in detail of the three faculties of the soul, with respect to the three logical virtues, in relation to this second night.

## CHAPTER V

*Wherein is described what is meant by union of the soul with God. A comparison is given.*<sup>231</sup>

---

<sup>230</sup>St. John ix, 39.

<sup>231</sup>As the Saint has explained above, this is a parenthetical chapter necessary to an understanding of the following chapters on the active purification of the three faculties of the soul; for, in order to make an intelligent use of the means to an end, it is important to know what that end is. St. John of the Cross begins by setting aside the numerous divisions under which the mystics speak of union with God and deals only with that which most usually concerns the soul, namely union which is active, and acquired by our own efforts, together with the habitual aid of grace. This is the kind of union which is most suitably described in this treatise, which deals with the intense activity of the soul as regards the purgation of the senses and faculties as a necessary means for the loving transformation of the soul in God -- the end and goal of all the Saint's writings. In order to forestall any grossly erroneous pantheistic interpretations, we point out, with the author of the *MŽdula M'stica* (Trat. V, Chap. i, No. 2), that by union the Saint understands 'a linking and conjoining of two things which, though united, are still different, each, as St. Thomas teaches (Pt. III, q. 2, a. 1), keeping its own nature, for otherwise there would not be union but identity. Union of the soul with God, therefore, will be a linking and conjoining of the soul with God and of God with the soul, for the one cannot be united with the other if the other be not united with the one, so that the soul is still the soul and God is still God. But just as, when two things are united, the one which has the most power, virtue and activity communicates its properties to the other, just so, since God has greater strength, virtue and activity than the soul, He communicates His properties to it and makes it, as it were, deific, and leaves it, as it were, divinized, to a greater or a lesser degree, corresponding to the greater or the lesser degree of union between the two.' This conception, which is a basic one in Christian mysticism, is that of St. John of the Cross. Had all his commentators understood that fact, some of them

FROM what has been said above it becomes clear to some extent what we mean by union of the soul with God; what we now say about it, therefore, will be the better understood. It is not my intention here to treat of the divisions of this union, nor of its parts, for I should never end if I were to begin now to explain what is the nature of union of the understanding, and what is that of union according to the will, and likewise according to the memory; and likewise what is transitory and what permanent in the union of the said faculties; and then what is meant by total union, transitory and permanent, with regard to the said faculties all together. All this we shall treat gradually in our discourse -- speaking first of one and then of another. But here this is not to the point in order to describe what we have to say concerning them; it will be explained much more fittingly in its place, when we shall again be treating the same matter, and shall have a striking illustration to add to the present explanation, so that everything will then be considered and explained and we shall judge of it better.

2. Here I treat only of this permanent and total union according to the substance of the soul and its faculties with respect to the obscure habit of union: for with respect to the act, we shall explain later, with the Divine favour, how there can be no permanent union in the faculties, in this life, but a transitory union only.

3. In order, then, to understand what is meant by this union whereof we are treating, it must be known that God dwells and is present substantially in every soul, even in that of the greatest sinner in the world. And this kind of union is ever wrought between God and all the creatures, for in it He is preserving their being: if union of this kind were to fail them, they would at once become annihilated and would cease to be. And so, when we speak of union of the soul with God, we speak not of this substantial union which is continually being wrought, but of the union and transformation of the soul with God, which is not being wrought continually, but only when there is produced that likeness that comes from love; we shall therefore term this the union of likeness, even as that other union is called substantial or essential. The former is natural, the latter supernatural. And the latter comes to pass when the two wills -- namely that of the soul and that of God -- are conformed together in one, and there is naught in the one that repugnant to the other. And thus, when the soul rids itself totally of that which is repugnant to the Divine will and conforms not with it, it is transformed in God through love.

4. This is to be understood of that which is repugnant, not only in action, but likewise in habit, so that not only must the voluntary acts of imperfection cease, but the habits of any such imperfections must be annihilated. And since no creature whatsoever, and none of its actions or abilities, can conform or can attain to that which is God, therefore must the soul be stripped of all things created, and of its own actions

---

would have been saved from making ridiculous comparisons of him with Gnostics, Illuminists or even the Eastern seekers after Nirvana. Actually, this Saint and Doctor of the Church applies the tenets of Catholic theology to the union of the soul with God, presenting them in a condensed and vigorous form and keeping also to strict psychological truth, as in general do the other Spanish mystics. This is one of his greatest merits. In this chapter he is speaking, not of essential union, which has nothing to do with his subject, but (presupposing the union worked through sanctifying grace received in the substance of the soul, which is the source of the infused virtues, such as faith, hope and charity, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit) of active actual union, after which we can and should strive, so that we may will what God wills and abhor what He abhors. Though not the only kind of union, it is this which chiefly concerns the soul; and, when once this is attained, God readily grants all other mystical gifts. Cf. St. Teresa's *Interior Castle*, V, iii [C.W.S.T.J., II, 259-60].

and abilities -- namely, of its understanding, perception and feeling -- so that, when all that is unlike God and unconformed to Him is cast out, the soul may receive the likeness of God; and nothing will then remain in it that is not the will of God and it will thus be transformed in God. Wherefore, although it is true that, as we have said, God is ever in the soul, giving it, and through His presence conserving within it, its natural being, yet He does not always communicate supernatural being to it. For this is communicated only by love and grace, which not all souls possess; and all those that possess it have it not in the same degree; for some have attained more degrees of love and others fewer. Wherefore God communicates Himself most to that soul that has progressed farthest in love; namely, that has its will in closest conformity with the will of God. And the soul that has attained complete conformity and likeness of will is totally united and transformed in God supernaturally. Wherefore, as has already been explained, the more completely a soul is wrapped up in<sup>232</sup> the creatures and in its own abilities, by habit and affection, the less preparation it has for such union; for it gives not God a complete opportunity to transform it supernaturally. The soul, then, needs only to strip itself of these natural dissimilarities and contrarieties, so that God, Who is communicating Himself naturally to it, according to the course of nature, may communicate Himself to it supernaturally, by means of grace.

5. And it is this that Saint John desired to explain when he said: *Qui non ex sanguinibus, neque ex voluntate carnis, neque ex voluntate viri, sed ex Deo nati sunt.*<sup>233</sup> As though he had said: He gave power to be sons of God -- that is, to be transformed in God -- only to those who are born, not of blood -- that is, not of natural constitution and temperament -- neither of the will of the flesh -- that is, of the free will of natural capacity and ability -- still less of the will of man -- wherein is included every way and manner of judging and comprehending with the understanding. He gave power to none of these to become sons of God, but only to those that are born of God -- that is, to those who, being born again through grace, and dying first of all to everything that is of the old man, are raised above themselves to the supernatural, and receive from God this rebirth and adoption, which transcends all that can be imagined. For, as Saint John himself says elsewhere: *Nisi quis renatus fuerit ex aqua, et Spiritu Sancto, non potest videre regnum Dei.*<sup>234</sup> This signifies: He that is not born again in the Holy Spirit will not be able to see this kingdom of God, which is the state of perfection; and to be born again in the Holy Spirit in this life is to have a soul most like to God in purity, having in itself no admixture of imperfection, so that pure transformation can be wrought in it through participation of union, albeit not essentially.

6. In order that both these things may be the better understood, let us make a comparison. A ray of sunlight is striking a window. If the window is in any way stained or misty, the sun's ray will be unable to illumine it and transform it into its own light, totally, as it would if it were clean of all these things, and pure; but it will illumine it to a lesser degree, in proportion as it is less free from those mists and stains; and will do so to a greater degree, in proportion as it is cleaner from them, and this will not be because of the sun's ray, but because of itself; so much so that, if it be wholly pure and clean, the ray of sunlight will transform it and illumine it in such wise that it will itself seem to be a ray and will give the same light as the ray. Although in reality the window has a nature

---

<sup>232</sup>[*Lit.*, 'is clothed with.']

<sup>233</sup>St. John i, 13.

<sup>234</sup>St. John iii, 5.

distinct from that of the ray itself, however much it may resemble it, yet we may say that that window is a ray of the sun or is light by participation. And the soul is like this window, whereupon is ever beating (or, to express it better, wherein is ever dwelling) this Divine light of the Being of God according to nature, which we have described.

7. In thus allowing God to work in it, the soul (having rid itself of every mist and stain of the creatures, which consists in having its will perfectly united with that of God, for to love is to labour to detach and strip itself for God's sake of all that is not God) is at once illumined and transformed in God, and God communicates to it His supernatural Being, in such wise that it appears to be God Himself, and has all that God Himself has. And this union comes to pass when God grants the soul this supernatural favour, that all the things of God and the soul are one in participant transformation; and the soul seems to be God rather than a soul, and is indeed God by participation; although it is true that its natural being, though thus transformed, is as distinct from the Being of God as it was before, even as the window has likewise a nature distinct from that of the ray, though the ray gives it brightness.

8. This makes it clearer that the preparation of the soul for this union, as we said, is not that it should understand or perceive or feel or imagine anything, concerning either God or aught else, but that it should have purity and love -- that is, perfect resignation and detachment from everything for God's sake alone; and, as there can be no perfect transformation if there be not perfect purity, and as the enlightenment, illumination and union of the soul with God will be according to the proportion of its purity, in greater or in less degree; yet the soul will not be perfect, as I say, if it be not wholly and perfectly<sup>235</sup> bright and clean.

9. This will likewise be understood by the following comparison. A picture is truly perfect, with many and most sublime beauties and delicate and subtle illuminations, and some of its beauties are so fine and subtle that they cannot be completely realized, because of their delicacy and excellence. Fewer beauties and less delicacy will be seen in this picture by one whose vision is less clear and refined; and he whose vision is somewhat more refined will be able to see in it more beauties and perfections; and, if another person has a vision still more refined, he will see still more perfection; and, finally, he who has the clearest and purest faculties will see the most beauties and perfections of all; for there is so much to see in the picture that, however far one may attain, there will ever remain higher degrees of attainment.

10. After the same manner we may describe the condition of the soul with relation to God in this enlightenment or transformation. For, although it is true that a soul, according to its greater or lesser capacity, may have attained to union, yet not all do so in an equal degree, for this depends upon what the Lord is pleased to grant to each one. It is in this way that souls see God in Heaven; some more, some less; but all see Him, and all are content, for their capacity is satisfied.

11. Wherefore, although in this life here below we find certain souls enjoying equal peace and tranquillity in the state of perfection, and each one of them satisfied, yet some of them may be many degrees higher than others. All, however, will be equally satisfied, because the capacity of each one is satisfied. But the soul that attains not to such a measure of purity as is in conformity with its capacity never attains true peace and satisfaction, since it has not attained to the possession of that detachment and emptiness in its faculties which is required for simple union.

---

<sup>235</sup>[*Lit.*, 'wholly perfect and...']

## CHAPTER VI

*Wherein is described how it is the three theological virtues that perfect the three faculties of the soul, and how the said virtues produce emptiness and darkness within them.*

HAVING now to endeavour to show how<sup>236</sup> the three faculties of the soul -- understanding, memory and will -- are brought into this spiritual night, which is the means to Divine union, it is necessary first of all to explain in this chapter how the three theological virtues -- faith, hope and charity -- which have respect to the three faculties aforesaid as their proper supernatural objects, and by means whereof the soul is united with God according to its faculties, produce the same emptiness and darkness, each one in its own faculty. Faith, in the understanding; hope, in the memory; and charity, in the will. And afterwards we shall go on to describe how the understanding is perfected in the darkness of faith; and the memory in the emptiness of hope; and likewise how the will must be buried by withdrawing and detaching every affection so that the soul may journey to God. This done, it will be clearly seen how necessary it is for the soul, if it is to walk securely on this spiritual road, to travel through this dark night, leaning upon these three virtues, which empty it of all things and make it dark with respect to them. For, as we have said, the soul is not united with God in this life through understanding, nor through enjoyment, nor through the imagination, nor through any sense whatsoever; but only through faith, according to the understanding; and through hope, according to the memory; and through love, according to the will.

2. These three virtues, as we have said, all cause emptiness in the faculties: faith, in the understanding, causes an emptiness and darkness with respect to understanding; hope, in the memory, causes emptiness of all possessions; and charity causes emptiness in the will and detachment from all affection and from rejoicing in all that is not God. For, as we see, faith tells us what cannot be understood with the understanding. Wherefore Saint Paul spoke of it *ad Hebraeos* after this manner: *Fides est sperandarum substantia rerum, argumentum non apparentium*.<sup>237</sup> This we interpret as meaning that faith is the substance of things hoped for; and, although the understanding may be firmly and certainly consenting to them, they are not things that are revealed to the understanding, since, if they were revealed to it, there would be no faith. So faith, although it brings certainty to the understanding, brings it not clearness, but obscurity.

3. Then, as to hope, there is no doubt but that it renders the memory empty and dark with respect both to things below and to things above. For hope always relates to that which is not possessed; for, if it were possessed, there would be no more hope. Wherefore Saint Paul says *ad Romanos*: *Spes, quae videtur, non est spes: nam quod videt quis, quid sperat?*<sup>238</sup> That is to say: Hope that is seen is not hope; for what a man seeth -- that is, what a man possesseth -- how doth he hope for it? This virtue, then, also produces emptiness, for it has to do with that which is not possessed and not with

---

<sup>236</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to lead... into,' as at the beginning of ¶ 6, below.]

<sup>237</sup>Hebrews xi, 1.

<sup>238</sup>Romans viii, 24.

that which is possessed.

4. Similarity, charity causes emptiness in the will with respect to all things, since it obliges us to love God above them all; which cannot be unless we withdraw our affection from them in order to set it wholly upon God. Wherefore Christ says, through Saint Luke: *Qui non renuntiat omnibus quae possidet, non potest meus esse discipulus*.<sup>239</sup> Which signifies: He that renounces not all that he possesses with the will cannot be My disciple. And thus all these three virtues set the soul in obscurity and emptiness with respect to all things.

5. And here we must consider that parable which our Redeemer related in the eleventh chapter of Saint Luke, wherein He said that a friend had to go out at midnight in order to ask his friend for three loaves;<sup>240</sup> the which loaves signify these three virtues. And he said that he asked for them at midnight in order to signify that the soul that is in darkness as to all things must acquire these three virtues according to its faculties and must perfect itself in them in this night. In the sixth chapter of Isaias we read that the two seraphim whom this Prophet saw on either side of God had each six wings; with two they covered their feet, which signified the blinding and quenching of the affections of the will with respect to all things for the sake of God; and with two they covered their face, which signified the darkness of the understanding in the presence of God; and with the other two they flew.<sup>241</sup> This is to signify the flight of hope to the things that are not possessed, when it is raised above all that it can possess, whether below or above, apart from God.

6. To these three virtues, then, we have to lead the three faculties of the soul, informing each faculty by each one of them, and stripping it and setting it in darkness concerning all things save only these three virtues. And this is the spiritual night which just now we called active; for the soul does that which in it lies in order to enter therein. And even as, in the night of sense, we described a method of voiding the faculties of sense of their sensible objects, with regard to the desire, so that the soul might go forth from the beginning of its course to the mean,<sup>242</sup> which is faith; even so, in this spiritual night, with the favour of God, we shall describe a method whereby the spiritual faculties are voided and purified of all that is not God, and are set in darkness concerning these three virtues, which, as we have said, are the means and preparation for the union of the soul with God.

7. In this method is found all security against the crafts of the devil and against the efficacy of self-love and its ramifications, which is wont most subtly to deceive and hinder spiritual persons on their road, when they know not how to become detached and to govern themselves according to these three virtues; and thus they are never able to reach the substance and purity of spiritual good, nor do they journey by so straight and short a road as they might.

8. And it must be noted that I am now speaking particularly to those who have begun to enter the state of contemplation, because as far as this concerns beginners it must be described somewhat more amply, as we shall note in the second book, God willing, when we treat of the properties of these beginners.

---

<sup>239</sup>St. Luke xiv, 33.

<sup>240</sup>Luke xi, 5.

<sup>241</sup>Isaias vi, 2.

<sup>242</sup>[Or 'middle.' Cf. Bk. I, chap. ii, above.]

## CHAPTER VII

*Wherein is described how strait is the way that leads to eternal life and how completely detached and disencumbered must be those that will walk in it. We begin to speak of the detachment of the understanding.*

WE have now to describe the detachment and purity of the three faculties of the soul and for this are necessary a far greater knowledge and spirituality than mine, in order to make clear to spiritual persons how strait is this road which, said Our Saviour, leads to life; so that, persuaded of this, they may not marvel at the emptiness and detachment to which, in this night, we have to abandon the faculties of the soul.

2. To this end must be carefully noted the words which Our Saviour used, in the seventh chapter of Saint Matthew, concerning this road, as follows: *Quam angusta porta, et arcta via est, quae ducit ad vitam, et pauci sunt, qui inveniunt eam.*<sup>243</sup> This signifies: How strait is the gate and how narrow the way that leadeth unto life, and few there are that find it! In this passage we must carefully note the emphasis and insistence which are contained in that word *Quam*. For it is as if He had said: In truth the way is very strait, more so than you think. And likewise it is to be noted that He says first that the gate is strait, to make it clear that, in order for the soul to enter by this gate, which is Christ, and which comes at the beginning of the road, the will must first be straitened and detached in all things sensual and temporal, and God must be loved above them all; which belongs to the night of sense, as we have said.

3. He then says that the way is narrow -- that is to say, the way of perfection -- in order to make it clear that, to travel upon the way of perfection, the soul has not only to enter by the strait gate, emptying itself of things of sense, but has also to straiten<sup>244</sup> itself, freeing and disencumbering itself completely in that which pertains to the spirit. And thus we can apply what He says of the strait gate to the sensual part of man; and what He says of the narrow road we can understand of the spiritual or the rational part; and, when He says 'Few there are that find it,' the reason of this must be noted, which is that there are few who can enter, and desire to enter, into this complete detachment and emptiness of spirit. For this path ascending the high mountain of perfection leads upward, and is narrow, and therefore requires travellers that have no burden weighing upon them with respect to lower things, neither aught that embarrasses them with respect to higher things: and, as this is a matter wherein we must seek after and attain to God alone, God alone must be the object of our search and attainment.

4. Hence it is clearly seen that the soul must not only be disencumbered from that which belongs to the creatures, but likewise, as it travels, must be annihilated and detached from all that belongs to its spirit. Wherefore Our Lord, instructing us and leading us into this road, gave, in the eighth chapter of St. Mark, that wonderful teaching of which I think it may almost be said that, the more necessary it is for spiritual persons, the less it is practised by them. As this teaching is so important and so much to our purpose, I shall reproduce it here in full, and expound it according to its genuine, spiritual sense. He says, then, thus: *Si quis vult me sequi, deneget semetipsum: et tollat crucem suam, et sequatur me. Qui enim voluerit animam suam salvam facere, perdet*

---

<sup>243</sup>St. Matthew vii, 14.

<sup>244</sup>[The Spanish verb, used also at the end of the preceding paragraph, is derived from the adjective.]



*eam: qui autem perdiderit animam suam propter me. . . salvam faciet eam.*<sup>245</sup> This signifies: If any man will follow My road, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For he that will save his soul shall lose it; but he that loses it for My sake, shall gain it.

5. Oh, that one could show us how to understand, practise and experience what this counsel is which our Saviour here gives us concerning self-denial,<sup>246</sup> so that spiritual persons might see in how different a way they should conduct themselves upon this road from that which many of them think proper! For they believe that any kind of retirement and reformation of life suffices; and others are content with practising the virtues and continuing in prayer and pursuing mortification; but they attain not to detachment and poverty or selflessness<sup>247</sup> or spiritual purity (which are all one), which the Lord here commends to us; for they prefer feeding and clothing their natural selves with spiritual feelings and consolations, to stripping themselves of all things, and denying themselves all things, for God's sake. For they think that it suffices to deny themselves worldly things without annihilating and purifying themselves of spiritual attachment. Wherefore it comes to pass that, when there presents itself to them any of this solid and perfect spirituality, consisting in the annihilation of all sweetness in God, in aridity, distaste and trial, which is the true spiritual cross, and the detachment of the spiritual poverty of Christ, they flee from it as from death, and seek only sweetness and delectable communion with God. This is not self-denial and detachment of spirit, but spiritual gluttony. Herein, spiritually, they become enemies of the Cross of Christ; for true spirituality seeks for God's sake that which is distasteful rather than that which is delectable; and inclines itself rather to suffering than to consolation; and desires to go without all blessings for God's sake rather than to possess them; and to endure aridities and afflictions rather than to enjoy sweet communications, knowing that this is to follow Christ and to deny oneself, and that the other is perchance to seek oneself in God, which is clean contrary to love. For to seek oneself in God is to seek the favours and refreshments of God; but to seek God in oneself is not only to desire to be without both of these for God's sake, but to be disposed to choose, for Christ's sake, all that is most distasteful, whether in relation to God or to the world; and this is love of God.

6. Oh, that one could tell us how far Our Lord desires this self-denial to be carried! It must certainly be like to death and annihilation, temporal, natural and spiritual, in all things that the will esteems, wherein consists all self-denial. And it is this that Our Lord meant when He said: 'He that will save his life, the same shall lose it.' That is to say: He that will possess anything or seek anything for himself, the same shall lose it; and he that loses his soul for My sake, the same shall gain it. That is to say: He who for Christ's sake renounces all that his will can desire and enjoy, and chooses that which is most like to the Cross (which the Lord Himself, through Saint John, describes as hating his soul<sup>248</sup>), the same shall gain it. And this His Majesty taught to those two disciples who went and begged Him for a place on His right hand and on His left; when, giving no countenance to their request for such glory, He offered them the chalice which He had

---

<sup>245</sup>St. Mark viii, 34-5.

<sup>246</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the denial of ourselves to our very selves.']

<sup>247</sup>[*enagenaci*—*n*, a word which to-day means 'alienation,' 'rapture,' 'derangement (of mind),' but in Covarrubias' dictionary (1611) is also defined as 'giving to another what is one's own.']

<sup>248</sup>St. John xii, 25.

to drink, as a thing more precious and more secure upon this earth than is fruition.<sup>249</sup>

7. This chalice is death to the natural self, a death attained through the detachment and annihilation of that self, in order that the soul may travel by this narrow path, with respect to all its connections with sense, as we have said, and according to the spirit, as we shall now say; that is, in its understanding and in its enjoyment and in its feeling. And, as a result, not only has the soul made its renunciation as regards both sense and spirit, but it is not hindered, even by that which is spiritual, in taking the narrow way, on which there is room only for self-denial (as the Saviour explains), and the Cross, which is the staff wherewith one may reach one's goal, and whereby the road is greatly lightened and made easy. Wherefore Our Lord said through Saint Matthew: 'My yoke is easy and My burden is light'; which burden is the cross. For if a man resolve to submit himself to carrying this cross -- that is to say, if he resolve to desire in truth to meet trials and to bear them in all things for God's sake, he will find in them all great relief and sweetness wherewith he may travel upon this road, detached from all things and desiring nothing. Yet, if he desire to possess anything -- whether it come from God or from any other source -- with any feeling of attachment, he has not stripped and denied himself in all things; and thus he will be unable to walk along this narrow path or to climb upward by it.

8. I would, then, that I could convince spiritual persons that this road to God consists not in a multiplicity of meditations nor in ways or methods of such, nor in consolations, although these things may in their own way be necessary to beginners; but that it consists only in the one thing that is needful, which is the ability to deny oneself truly, according to that which is without and to that which is within, giving oneself up to suffering for Christ's sake, and to total annihilation. For the soul that practises this suffering and annihilation will achieve all that those other exercises can achieve, and that can be found in them, and even more. And if a soul be found wanting in this exercise, which is the sum and root of the virtues, all its other methods are so much beating about the bush, and profiting not at all, although its meditations and communications may be as lofty as those of the angels. For progress comes not save through the imitation of Christ, Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life, and no man comes to the Father but by Him, even as He Himself says through Saint John.<sup>250</sup> And elsewhere He says: 'I am the door; by Me if any man enter he shall be saved.'<sup>251</sup> Wherefore, as it seems to me, any spirituality that would fain walk in sweetness and with ease, and flees from the imitation of Christ, is worthless.

9. And, as I have said that Christ is the Way, and that this Way is death to our natural selves, in things both of sense and of spirit, I will now explain how we are to die, following the example of Christ, for He is our example and light.

10. In the first place, it is certain that He died as to sense, spiritually, in His life, besides dying naturally, at His death. For, as He said, He had not in His life where to lay His head, and at His death this was even truer.

11. In the second place, it is certain that, at the moment of His death, He was likewise annihilated in His soul, and was deprived of any relief and consolation, since His Father left Him in the most intense aridity, according to the lower part of His nature. Wherefore He had perforce to cry out, saying: 'My God! My God! 'Why hast Thou

---

<sup>249</sup>St. Matthew xx, 22.

<sup>250</sup>John xiv, 6.

<sup>251</sup>St. John x, 9.

forsaken Me?'<sup>252</sup> This was the greatest desolation, with respect to sense, that He had suffered in His life. And thus He wrought herein the greatest work that He had ever wrought, whether in miracles or in mighty works, during the whole of His life, either upon earth or in Heaven, which was the reconciliation and union of mankind, through grace, with God. And this, as I say, was at the moment and the time when this Lord was most completely annihilated in everything. Annihilated, that is to say, with respect to human reputation; since, when men saw Him die, they mocked Him rather than esteemed Him; and also with respect to nature, since His nature was annihilated when He died; and further with respect to the spiritual consolation and protection of the Father, since at that time He forsook Him, that He might pay the whole of man's debt and unite him with God, being thus annihilated and reduced as it were to nothing. Wherefore David says concerning Him: *Ad nihilum redactus sum, et nescivi*.<sup>253</sup> This he said that the truly spiritual man may understand the mystery of the gate and of the way of Christ, and so become united with God, and may know that, the more completely he is annihilated for God's sake, according to these two parts, the sensual and the spiritual, the more completely is he united to God and the greater is the work which he accomplishes. And when at last he is reduced to nothing, which will be the greatest extreme of humility, spiritual union will be wrought between the soul and God, which in this life is the greatest and the highest state attainable. This consists not, then, in refreshment and in consolations and spiritual feelings, but in a living death of the Cross, both as to sense and as to spirit -- that is, both inwardly and outwardly.

12. I will not pursue this subject farther, although I have no desire to finish speaking of it, for I see that Christ is known very little by those who consider themselves His friends: we see them seeking in Him their own pleasures and consolations because of their great love for themselves, but not loving His bitter trials and His death because of their great love for Him. I am speaking now of those who consider themselves His friends; for such as live far away, withdrawn from Him, men of great learning and influence, and all others who live yonder, with the world, and are eager about their ambitions and their prelacies, may be said not to know Christ; and their end, however good, will be very bitter. Of such I make no mention in these lines; but mention will be made of them on the Day of Judgment, for to them it was fitting to speak first this word of God,<sup>254</sup> as to those whom God set up as a target for it,<sup>255</sup> by reason of their learning and their high position.

13. But let us now address the understanding of the spiritual man, and particularly that of the man to whom God has granted the favour of leading him into the state of contemplation (for, as I have said, I am now speaking to these in particular), and let us say how such a man must direct himself toward God in faith, and purify himself from contrary things, constraining himself that he may enter upon this narrow path of obscure contemplation.

---

<sup>252</sup>St. Matthew xxvii, 46.

<sup>253</sup>Psalm lxxii, 22 [A.V., lxxiii, 22].

<sup>254</sup>[The reference seems to be to Acts xiii, 46, the point of it being in the second part of that verse. The Spanish will also bear the interpretation: 'for them it behoved first (i.e., before others) to speak this word of God, as (being) those whom God set up as guides, etc.']

<sup>255</sup>[By this vivid phrase the author seems to mean: 'whom God held to be suitable recipients of it.']

## CHAPTER VIII

*Which describes in a general way how no creature and no knowledge that can be comprehended by the understanding can serve as a proximate means of Divine union with God.*

BEFORE we treat of the proper and fitting means of union with God, which is faith, it behoves us to prove how no thing, created or imagined, can serve the understanding as a proper means of union with God; and how all that the understanding can attain serves it rather as an impediment than as such a means, if it should desire to cling to it. And now, in this chapter, we shall prove this in a general way, and afterwards we shall begin to speak in detail, treating in turn of all kinds of knowledge that the understanding may receive from any sense, whether inward or outward, and of the inconveniences and evils that may result from all these kinds of inward and outward knowledge, when it clings not, as it progresses, to the proper means, which is faith.

2. It must be understood, then, that, according to a rule of philosophy, all means must be proportioned to the end; that is to say, they must have some connection and resemblance with the end, such as is enough and sufficient for the desired end to be attained through them. I take an example. A man desires to reach a city; he has of necessity to travel by the road, which is the means that brings him to this same city and connects<sup>256</sup> him with it. Another example. Fire is to be combined and united with wood; it is necessary that heat, which is the means, shall first prepare the wood, by conveying to it so many degrees of warmth that it will have great resemblance and proportion to fire. Now if one would prepare the wood by any other than the proper means -- namely, with heat -- as, for example, with air or water or earth, it would be impossible for the wood to be united with the fire, just as it would be to reach the city without going by the road that leads to it. Wherefore, in order that the understanding may be united with God in this life, so far as is possible, it must of necessity employ that means that unites it with Him and that bears the greatest resemblance to Him.

3. Here it must be pointed out that, among all the creatures, the highest or the lowest, there is none that comes near to God or bears any resemblance to His Being. For, although it is true that all creatures have, as theologians say, a certain relation to God, and bear a Divine impress (some more and others less, according to the greater or lesser excellence of their nature), yet there is no essential resemblance or connection between them and God -- on the contrary, the distance between their being and His Divine Being is infinite. Wherefore it is impossible for the understanding to attain to God by means of the creatures, whether these be celestial or earthly, inasmuch as there is no proportion or resemblance between them. Wherefore, when David speaks of the heavenly creatures, he says: 'There is none among the gods like unto Thee, O Lord';<sup>257</sup> meaning by the gods the angels and holy souls. And elsewhere: 'O God, Thy way is in the holy place. What God is there so great as our God?'<sup>258</sup> As though he were to say: The way of approach to Thee, O God, is a holy way -- that is, the purity of faith. For what God can there be so great? That is to say: What angel will there be so exalted in his being, and what saint so exalted in glory, as to be a proportionate and sufficient road

---

<sup>256</sup>[*Lit.*, 'unite.']

<sup>257</sup>Psalm lxxxv, 8 [A.V., lxxxvi, 8].

<sup>258</sup>Psalm lxxvi, 14 [A.V., lxxvii, 13] [*lit.*, 'in that which is holy'].

by which a man may come to Thee? And the same David, speaking likewise of earthly and heavenly things both together, says: 'The Lord is high and looketh on lowly things, and the high things He knoweth afar off'<sup>259</sup> As though he had said: Lofty in His own Being, He sees that the being of things here below is very low in comparison with His lofty Being; and the lofty things, which are the celestial creatures, He sees and knows to be very far from His Being. All the creatures, then, cannot serve as a proportionate means to the understanding whereby it may reach God.

4. Just so all that the imagination can imagine and the understanding can receive and understand in this life is not, nor can it be, a proximate means of union with God. For, if we speak of natural things, since understanding can understand naught save that which is contained within, and comes under the category of, forms and imaginings of things that are received through the bodily senses, the which things, we have said, cannot serve as means, it can make no use of natural intelligence. And, if we speak of the supernatural (in so far as is possible in this life of our ordinary faculties), the understanding in its bodily prison has no preparation or capacity for receiving the clear knowledge of God; for such knowledge belongs not to this state, and we must either die or remain without receiving it. Wherefore Moses, when he entreated God for this clear knowledge, was told by God that he would be unable to see Him, in these words: 'No man shall see Me and remain alive.'<sup>260</sup> Wherefore Saint John says: 'No man hath seen God at any time,<sup>261</sup> neither aught that is like to Him.' And Saint Paul says, with Isaias: 'Eye hath not seen Him, nor hath ear heard Him, neither hath it entered into the heart of man.'<sup>262</sup> And it is for this reason that, as is said in the Acts of the Apostles,<sup>263</sup> Moses, in the bush, durst not consider for as long as God was present; for he knew that his understanding could make no consideration that was fitting concerning God, corresponding to the sense which he had of God's presence. And of Elias, our father, it is said that he covered his face on the Mount in the presence of God<sup>264</sup> -- an action signifying the blinding of his understanding, which he wrought there, daring not to lay so base a hand upon that which was so high, and seeing clearly that whatsoever he might consider or understand with any precision would be very far from God and completely unlike Him.

5. Wherefore no supernatural apprehension or knowledge in this mortal state can serve as a proximate means to the high union of love with God. For all that can be understood by the understanding, that can be tasted by the will, and that can be invented by the imagination is most unlike to God and bears no proportion to Him, as we have said. All this Isaias admirably explained in that most noteworthy passage, where he says: 'To what thing have ye been able to liken God? Or what image will ye make that is like to Him? Will the workman in iron perchance be able to make a graven image? Or will he that works gold be able to imitate Him<sup>265</sup> with gold, or the silversmith with plates of silver?'<sup>266</sup> By the workman in iron is signified the understanding, the office

---

<sup>259</sup>Psalm cxxxvii, 6 [A.V., cxxxviii, 6].

<sup>260</sup>Exodus xxxiii, 20.

<sup>261</sup>St. John i, 18.

<sup>262</sup>1 Corinthians ii, 9; Isaias lxiv, 4.

<sup>263</sup>Acts vii, 32.

<sup>264</sup>3 Kings [A.V. 1 Kings] xix, 13.

<sup>265</sup>[*Lit.*, 'feign Him.']

<sup>266</sup>Isaias xl, 18-19.

of which is to form intelligences and strip them of the iron of species and images. By the workman in gold is understood the will, which is able to receive the figure and the form of pleasure, caused by the gold of love. By the silversmith, who is spoken of as being unable to form<sup>267</sup> Him with plates of silver, is understood the memory, with the imagination, whereof it may be said with great propriety that its knowledge and the imaginings that it can invent<sup>268</sup> and make are like plates of silver. And thus it is as though he had said: Neither the understanding with its intelligence will be able to understand aught that is like Him, nor can the will taste pleasure and sweetness that bears any resemblance to that which is God, neither can the memory set in the imagination ideas and images that represent Him. It is clear, then, that none of these kinds of knowledge can lead the understanding direct to God; and that, in order to reach Him, a soul must rather proceed by not understanding than by desiring to understand; and by blinding itself and setting itself in darkness, rather than by opening its eyes, in order the more nearly to approach the ray Divine.

6. And thus it is that contemplation, whereby the understanding has the loftiest knowledge of God, is called mystical theology, which signifies secret wisdom of God; for it is secret even to the understanding that receives it. For that reason Saint Dionysius calls it a ray of darkness. Of this the prophet Baruch says: 'There is none that knoweth its way, nor any that can think of its paths.'<sup>269</sup> It is clear, then, that the understanding must be blind to all paths that are open to it in order that it may be united with God. Aristotle says that, even as are the eyes of the bat with regard to the sun, which is total darkness to it, even so is our understanding to that which is greater light in God, which is total darkness to us. And he says further that, the loftier and clearer are the things of God in themselves, the more completely unknown and obscure are they to us. This likewise the Apostle affirms, saying: 'The lofty things of God are the least known unto men.'<sup>270</sup>

7. But we should never end if we continued at this rate to quote authorities and arguments to prove and make clear that among all created things, and things that can be apprehended by the understanding, there is no ladder whereby the understanding can attain to this high Lord. Rather it is necessary to know that, if the understanding should seek to make use of all these things, or of any of them, as a proximate means to such union, they would be not only a hindrance, but even an occasion of numerous errors and delusions in the ascent of this mount.

## CHAPTER IX

*How faith is the proximate and proportionate means to the understanding whereby the soul may attain to the Divine union of love. This is proved by passages and figures from Divine Scripture.*

FROM what has been said it is to be inferred that, in order for the understanding to be prepared for this Divine union, it must be pure and void of all that pertains to sense, and

---

<sup>267</sup>[All authorities read 'form' (or 'figure') here. Cf. n. 7, above.]

<sup>268</sup>[This is the word (*fingir*, 'feign'), translated above as 'imitate.' Cf. n. 7, above.]

<sup>269</sup>Baruch iii, 23.

<sup>270</sup>[Possibly a further reference to 1 Corinthians ii, 9-10, quoted above.]

detached and freed from all that can clearly be apprehended by the understanding, profoundly hushed and put to silence, and leaning upon faith, which alone is the proximate and proportionate means whereby the soul is united with God; for such is the likeness between itself and God that there is no other difference, save that which exists between seeing God and believing in Him. For, even as God is infinite, so faith sets Him before us as infinite; and, as He is Three and One, it sets Him before us as Three and One; and, as God is darkness to our understanding, even so does faith likewise blind and dazzle our understanding. And thus, by this means alone, God manifests Himself to the soul in Divine light, which passes all understanding. And therefore, the greater is the faith of the soul, the more closely is it united with God. It is this that Saint Paul meant in the passage which we quoted above, where he says: 'He that will be united with God must believe.'<sup>271</sup> That is, he must walk by faith as he journeys to Him, the understanding being blind and in darkness, walking in faith alone; for beneath this darkness the understanding is united with God, and beneath it God is hidden, even as David said in these words: 'He set darkness under His feet. And He rose upon the cherubim, and flew upon the wings of the wind. And He made darkness, and the dark water, His hiding-place.'<sup>272</sup>

2. By his saying that He set darkness beneath His feet, and that He took the darkness for a hiding-place, and that His tabernacle round about Him was in the dark water, is denoted the obscurity of the faith wherein He is concealed. And by his saying that He rose upon the cherubim and flew upon the wings of the winds, is understood His soaring above all understanding. For the cherubim denote those who understand or contemplate. And the wings of the winds signify the subtle and lofty ideas and conceptions of spirits, above all of which is His Being, and to which none, by his own power, can attain.

3. This we learn from an illustration in the Scriptures. When Solomon had completed the building of the Temple, God came down in darkness and filled the Temple so that the children of Israel could not see; whereupon Solomon spake and said: 'The Lord hath promised that He will dwell in darkness'.<sup>273</sup> Likewise He appeared in darkness to Moses on the Mount, where God was concealed. And whensoever God communicated Himself intimately, He appeared in darkness, as may be seen in Job, where the Scripture says that God spoke with him from the darkness of the air.<sup>274</sup> All these mentions of darkness signify the obscurity of the faith wherein the Divinity is concealed, when It communicates Itself to the soul; which will be ended when, as Saint Paul says, that which is in part shall be ended,<sup>275</sup> which is this darkness of faith, and that which is perfect shall come, which is the Divine light. Of this we have a good illustration in the army of Gedeon, whereof it is said all the soldiers had lamps in their hands, which they saw not, because they had them concealed in the darkness of the pitchers; but, when these pitchers were broken, the light was seen.<sup>276</sup> Just so does faith, which is foreshadowed by those pitchers, contain within itself Divine light; which, when it is ended and broken, at the ending and breaking of this mortal life, will allow the

---

<sup>271</sup>Hebrews xi, 6.

<sup>272</sup>Psalms xvii, 10-12 [A.V., xviii, 9-11].

<sup>273</sup>3 Kings [A.V., 1 Kings] viii, 12.

<sup>274</sup>Job xxxviii, 1; xl, 1.

<sup>275</sup>1 Corinthians xiii, 10.

<sup>276</sup>Judges viii, 16.

glory and light of the Divinity, which was contained in it, to appear.

4. It is clear, then, that, if the soul in this life is to attain to union with God, and commune directly with Him, it must unite itself with the darkness whereof Solomon spake, wherein God had promised to dwell, and must draw near to the darkness of the air wherein God was pleased to reveal His secrets to Job, and must take in its hands, in darkness, the jars of Gedeon, that it may have in its hands (that is, in the works of its will) the light, which is the union of love, though it be in the darkness of faith, so that, when the pitchers of this life are broken, which alone have kept from it the light of faith, it may see God face to face in glory.

5. It now remains to describe in detail all the types of knowledge and the apprehensions which the understanding can receive; the hindrance and the harm which it can receive upon this road of faith; and the way wherein the soul must conduct itself so that, whether they proceed from the senses or from the spirit, they may cause it, not harm, but profit.

## CHAPTER X

*Wherein distinction is made between all apprehensions and types of knowledge which can be comprehended by the understanding.*

IN order to treat in detail of the profit and the harm which may come to the soul, with respect to this means to Divine union which we have described -- namely, faith -- through the ideas and apprehensions of the understanding, it is necessary here to make a distinction between all the apprehensions, whether natural or supernatural, that the soul may receive, so that then, with regard to each of them in order, we may direct the understanding with greater clearness into the night and obscurity of faith. This will be done with all possible brevity.

2. It must be known, then, that the understanding can receive knowledge and intelligence by two channels: the one natural and the other supernatural. By the natural channel is meant all that the understanding can understand, whether by means of the bodily senses or by its own power.<sup>277</sup> The supernatural channel is all that is given to the understanding over and above its natural ability and capacity.

3. Of these kinds of supernatural knowledge, some are corporeal and some are spiritual. The corporeal are two in number: some are received by means of the outward bodily senses; others, by means of the inward bodily senses, wherein is comprehended all that the imagination can comprehend, form and conceive.

4. The spiritual supernatural knowledge is likewise of two kinds: that which is distinct and special in its nature, and that which is confused, general and dark. Of the distinct and special kind there are four manners of apprehension which are communicated to the spirit without the aid of any bodily sense: these are visions, revelations, locutions and spiritual feelings. The obscure and general type of knowledge is of one kind alone, which is contemplation that is given in faith. To this we have to lead the soul by bringing it thereto through all these other means, beginning with the first and detaching it from them.

---

<sup>277</sup>[*Lit.*, 'by itself.']



## CHAPTER XI

*Of the hindrance and harm that may be caused by apprehensions of the understanding which proceed from that which is supernaturally represented to the outward bodily senses; and how the soul is to conduct itself therein.*

THE first kinds of knowledge whereof we have spoken in the preceding chapter are those that belong to the understanding and come through natural channels. Of these, since we have treated them already in the first book, where we led the soul into the night of sense, we shall here say not a word, for in that place we gave suitable instruction to the soul concerning them. What we have to treat, therefore, in the present chapter, will be solely those kinds of knowledge and those apprehensions which belong to the understanding and come supernaturally, by way of the outward bodily senses -- namely, by seeing, hearing, smelling, tasting and touching. With respect to all these there may come, and there are wont to come, to spiritual persons representations and objects of a supernatural kind. With respect to sight, they are apt to picture figures and forms of persons belonging to the life to come -- the forms of certain saints, and representations of angels, good and evil, and certain lights and brightnesses of an extraordinary kind. And with the ears they hear certain extraordinary words, sometimes spoken by those figures that they see, sometimes without seeing the person who speaks them. As to the sense of smell, they sometimes perceive the sweetest perfumes with the senses, without knowing whence they proceed. Likewise, as to taste, it comes to pass that they are conscious of the sweetest savours, and, as to touch, they experience great delight -- sometimes to such a degree that it is as though all the bones and the marrow rejoice and sing<sup>278</sup> and are bathed in delight; this is like that which we call spiritual unction, which in pure souls proceeds from the spirit and flows into the very members. And this sensible sweetness is a very ordinary thing with spiritual persons, for it comes to them from their sensible affection and devotion,<sup>279</sup> to a greater or a lesser degree, to each one after his own manner.

2. And it must be known that, although all these things may happen to the bodily senses in the way of God, we must never rely upon them or accept them, but must always fly from them, without trying to ascertain whether they be good or evil; for, the more completely exterior and corporeal they are, the less certainly are they of God. For it is more proper and habitual to God to communicate Himself to the spirit, wherein there is more security and profit for the soul, than to sense, wherein there is ordinarily much danger and deception; for bodily sense judges and makes its estimate of spiritual things by thinking that they are as it feels them to be, whereas they are as different as is the body from the soul and sensuality<sup>280</sup> from reason. For the bodily sense is as ignorant of spiritual things as is a beast of rational things, and even more so.

3. So he that esteems such things errs greatly and exposes himself to great peril of being deceived; in any case he will have within himself a complete impediment to the attainment of spirituality. For, as we have said, between spiritual things and all these

---

<sup>278</sup>[*Lit.*, 'and blossom.']

<sup>279</sup>[*Lit.*, 'from the affection and devotion of the sensible spirit.']

<sup>280</sup>[P. Silverio remarks here that] we must understand [as frequently elsewhere] 'sensibility' and not sensuality in the grosser sense.

bodily things there exists no kind of proportion whatever. And thus it may always be supposed that such things as these are more likely to be of the devil than of God; for the devil has more influence in that which is exterior and corporeal, and can deceive a soul more easily thereby than by that which is more interior and spiritual.

4. And the more exterior are these corporeal forms and objects in themselves, the less do they profit the interior and spiritual nature, because of the great distance and the lack of proportion existing between the corporeal and the spiritual. For, although there is communicated by their means a certain degree of spirituality, as is always the case with things that come from God, much less is communicated than would be the case if the same things were more interior and spiritual. And thus they very easily become the means whereby error and presumption and vanity grow in the soul; since, as they are so palpable and material, they stir the senses greatly, and it appears to the judgment of the soul that they are of greater importance because they are more readily felt. Thus the soul goes after them, abandoning faith and thinking that the light which it receives from them is the guide and means to its desired goal, which is union with God. But the more attention it pays to such things, the farther it strays from the true way and means, which are faith.

5. And, besides all this, when the soul sees that such extraordinary things happen to it, it is often visited, insidiously and secretly by a certain complacency, so that it thinks itself to be of some importance in the eyes of God; which is contrary to humility. The devil, too, knows how to insinuate into the soul a secret satisfaction with itself, which at times becomes very evident; wherefore he frequently represents these objects to the senses, setting before the eyes figures of saints and most beauteous lights; and before the ears words very much dissembled; and representing also sweetest perfumes, delicious tastes<sup>281</sup> and things delectable to the touch; to the end that, by producing desires for such things, he may lead the soul into much evil. These representations and feelings, therefore, must always be rejected; for, even though some of them be of God, He is not offended by their rejection, nor is the effect and fruit which He desires to produce in the soul by means of them any the less surely received because the soul rejects them and desires them not.

6. The reason for this is that corporeal vision, or feeling in respect to any of the other senses, or any other communication of the most interior kind, if it be of God, produces its effect upon the spirit at the very moment when it appears or is felt, without giving the soul time or opportunity to deliberate whether it will accept or reject it. For, even as God gives these things supernaturally, without effort on the part of the soul, and independently of its capacity, even so likewise, without respect to its effort or capacity, God produces in it the effect that He desires by means of such things; for this is a thing that is wrought and brought to pass in the spirit passively; and thus its acceptance or non-acceptance consists not in the acceptance or the rejection of it by the will. It is as though fire were applied to a person's naked body: it would matter little whether or no he wished to be burned; the fire would of necessity accomplish its work. Just so is it with visions and representations that are good: even though the soul desire it not, they work their effect upon it, chiefly and especially in the soul, rather than in the body. And likewise those that come from the devil (without the consent of the soul) cause it disturbance or aridity or vanity or presumption in the spirit. Yet these are not so effective to work evil as are those of God to work good; for those of the devil can only set in

---

<sup>281</sup>[*Lit.*, 'and sweetnesses in the mouth.']

action the first movements of the will,<sup>282</sup> and move it no farther, unless the soul be consenting thereto; and such trouble continues not long unless the soul's lack of courage and prudence be the occasion of its continuance. But the visions that are of God penetrate the soul and move the will to love, and produce their effect, which the soul cannot resist even though it would, any more than the window can resist the sun's rays when they strike

7. The soul, then, must never presume to desire to receive them, even though, as I say, they be of God; for, if it desire to receive them, there follow six inconveniences.

The first is that faith grows gradually less; for things that are experienced by the senses derogate from faith; since faith, as we have said, transcends every sense. And thus the soul withdraws itself from the means of union with God when it closes not its eyes to all these things of sense.

Secondly, if they be not rejected, they are a hindrance to the spirit, for the soul rests in them and its spirit soars not to the invisible. This was one of the reasons why the Lord said to His disciples that it was needful for Him to go away that the Holy Spirit might come; so, too, He forbade Mary Magdalene to touch His feet, after His resurrection, that she might be grounded in faith.

Thirdly, the soul becomes attached to these things and advances not to true resignation and detachment of spirit.

Fourthly, it begins to lose the effect of them and the inward spirituality which they cause it, because it sets its eyes upon their sensual aspect, which is the least important. And thus it receives not so fully the spirituality which they cause, which is impressed and preserved more securely when all things of sense are rejected, since these are very different from pure spirit.

Fifthly, the soul begins to lose the favours of God, because it accepts them as though they belonged to it and profits not by them as it should. And to accept them in this way and not to profit by them is to seek after them; but God gives them not that the soul may seek after them; nor should the soul take upon itself to believe that they are of God.<sup>283</sup>

Sixthly, a readiness to accept them opens the door to the devil that he may deceive the soul by other things like to them, which he very well knows how to dissimulate and disguise, so that they may appear to be good; for, as the Apostle says, he can transform himself into an angel of light.<sup>284</sup> Of this we shall treat hereafter, by the Divine favour, in our third book, in the chapter upon spiritual gluttony.

8. It is always well, then, that the soul should reject these things, and close its eyes to them, whencesoever they come. For, unless it does so, it will prepare the way for those things that come from the devil, and will give him such influence that, not only will his visions come in place of God's, but his visions will begin to increase, and those of God to cease, in such manner that the devil will have all the power and God will have none. So it has happened to many incautious and ignorant souls, who rely on these things to such an extent that many of them have found it hard to return to God in purity of faith; and many have been unable to return, so securely has the devil rooted himself

---

<sup>282</sup>E.p.: 'for those of the devil stop at the first movements and cannot move the will.' This, no doubt, was the Saint's meaning, for the Church teaches that the devil cannot influence the will directly, though he may do so indirectly, principally through the senses and the imagination.

<sup>283</sup>St. John of the Cross means that the soul should not rely upon its own judgment in such matters but upon some discreet and learned director.

<sup>284</sup>2 Corinthians xi, 14.

in them; for which reason it is well to resist and reject them all. For, by the rejection of evil visions, the errors of the devil are avoided, and by the rejection of good visions no hindrance is offered to faith and the spirit harvests the fruit of them. And just as, when the soul allows them entrance, God begins to withhold them because the soul is becoming attached to them and is not profiting by them as it should, while the devil insinuates and increases his own visions, where he finds occasion and cause for them; just so, when the soul is resigned, or even averse to them, the devil begins to desist, since he sees that he is working it no harm; and contrariwise God begins to increase and magnify His favours in a soul that is so humble and detached, making it ruler over<sup>285</sup> many things, even as He made the servant who was faithful in small things.<sup>286</sup>

9. In these favours, if the soul be faithful and humble,<sup>287</sup> the Lord will not cease until He has raised it from one step to another, even to Divine union and transformation. For Our Lord continues to prove the soul and to raise it ever higher, so that He first gives it things that are very unpretentious and exterior and in the order of sense, in conformity with the smallness of its capacity; to the end that, when it behaves as it should, and receives these first morsels with moderation for its strength and sustenance, He may grant it further and better food. If, then, the soul conquer the devil upon the first step, it will pass to the second; and if upon the second likewise, it will pass to the third; and so onward, through all seven mansions,<sup>288</sup> which are the seven steps of love, until the Spouse shall bring it to the cellar of wine of His perfect charity.

10. Happy the soul that can fight against that beast of the Apocalypse,<sup>289</sup> which has seven heads, set over against these seven steps of love, and which makes war therewith against each one, and strives therewith against the soul in each of these mansions, wherein the soul is being exercised and is mounting step by step in the love of God. And undoubtedly if it strive faithfully against each of these heads, and gain the victory, it will deserve to pass from one step to another, and from one mansion to another, even unto the last, leaving the beast vanquished after destroying its seven heads, wherewith it made so furious a war upon it. So furious is this war that Saint John says in that place<sup>290</sup> that it was given unto the beast to make war against the saints and to be able to overcome them upon each one of these steps of love, arraying against each one many weapons and munitions of war. And it is therefore greatly to be lamented that many who engage in this spiritual battle against the beast do not even destroy its first head by denying themselves the sensual things of the world. And, though some destroy and cut off this head, they destroy not the second head, which is that of the visions of sense whereof we are speaking. But what is most to be lamented is that some, having destroyed not only the first and the second but even the third, which is that of the interior senses, pass out of the state of meditation, and travel still farther onward, and are overcome by this spiritual beast at the moment of their entering into purity of spirit, for he rises up against them once more, and even his first head comes to life again, and the last state of those souls is worse than the first, since, when

---

<sup>285</sup>[*Lit.*, 'making it over.'] E.p. has: 'setting it and placing it over.'

<sup>286</sup>[St. Matthew xxv, 21.]

<sup>287</sup>[*Lit.*, 'and retired.']

<sup>288</sup>[The phrase is suggestive of St. Teresa, though the Spanish word is not *moradas*, but *mansiones*.]

<sup>289</sup>[Apocalypse xiii, 1.]

<sup>290</sup>[Apocalypse xiii, 7.]

they fall back, the beast brings with him seven other spirits worse than himself.<sup>291</sup>

11. The spiritual person, then, has to deny himself all the apprehensions, and the temporal delights, that belong to the outward senses, if he will destroy the first and the second head of this beast, and enter into the first chamber of love, and the second, which is of living faith, desiring neither to lay hold upon, nor to be embarrassed by, that which is given to the senses, since it is this that derogates most from faith.

12. It is clear, then, that these sensual apprehensions and visions cannot be a means to union, since they bear no proportion to God; and this was one of the reasons why Christ desired that the Magdalene and Saint Thomas should not touch Him. And so the devil rejoices greatly when a soul desires to receive revelations, and when he sees it inclined to them, for he has then a great occasion and opportunity to insinuate errors and, in so far as he is able, to derogate from faith; for, as I have said, he renders the soul that desires them very gross, and at times even leads it into many temptations and unseemly ways.

13. I have written at some length of these outward apprehensions in order to throw and shed rather more light on the others, whereof we have to treat shortly. There is so much to say on this part of my subject that I could go on and never end. I believe, however, that I am summarizing it sufficiently by merely saying that the soul must take care never to receive these apprehensions, save occasionally on another person's advice, which should very rarely be given, and even then it must have no desire for them. I think that on this part of my subject what I have said is sufficient.

## CHAPTER XII

*Which treats of natural imaginary apprehensions. Describes their nature and proves that they cannot be a proportionate means of attainment to union with God. Shows the harm which results from inability to detach oneself from them.*

BEFORE we treat of the imaginary visions which are wont to occur supernaturally to the interior sense, which is the imagination and the fancy, it is fitting here, so that we may proceed in order, to treat of the natural apprehensions of this same interior bodily sense, in order that we may proceed from the lesser to the greater, and from the more exterior to the more interior, until we reach the most interior<sup>292</sup> recollection wherein the soul is united with God; this same order we have followed up to this point. For we treated first of all the detachment of the exterior senses from the natural apprehensions of objects, and, in consequence, from the natural power of the desires -- this was contained in the first book, wherein we spoke of the night of sense. We then began to detach these same senses from supernatural exterior apprehensions (which, as we have just shown in the last chapter, affect the exterior senses), in order to lead the soul into the night of the spirit.

2. In this second book, the first thing that has now to be treated is the interior bodily sense -- namely, the imagination and the fancy; this we must likewise void of all the imaginary apprehensions and forms that may belong to it by nature, and we must prove how impossible it is that the soul should attain to union with God until its operation

---

<sup>291</sup>[St. Luke xi, 26.]

<sup>292</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the intimate'; but the superlative idea is clearly present.]

cease in them, since they cannot be the proper and proximate means of this union.

3. It is to be known, then, that the senses whereof we are here particularly speaking are two interior bodily senses which are called imagination and fancy, which subserve each other in due order. For the one sense reasons, as it were, by imagining, and the other forms the imagination, or that which is imagined, by making use of the fancy.<sup>293</sup> For our purpose the discussion of the one is equivalent to that of the other, and, for this reason, when we name them not both, it must be understood that we are speaking of either, as we have here explained. All the things, then, that these senses can receive and fashion are known as imaginations and fancies, which are forms that are represented to these senses by bodily figures and images. This can happen in two ways. The one way is supernatural, wherein representation can be made, and is made, to these senses passively, without any effort of their own; these we call imaginary visions, produced after a supernatural manner, and of these we shall speak hereafter. The other way is natural, wherein, through the ability of the soul, these things can be actively fashioned in it through its operation, beneath forms, figures and images. And thus to these two faculties belongs meditation, which is a discursive action wrought by means of images, forms and figures that are fashioned and imagined by the said senses, as when we imagine Christ crucified, or bound to the column, or at another of the stations; or when we imagine God seated upon a throne with great majesty; or when we consider and imagine glory to be like a most beautiful light, etc.; or when we imagine all kinds of other things, whether Divine or human, that can belong to the imagination. All these imaginings must be cast out from the Soul, which will remain in darkness as far as this sense is concerned, that it may attain to Divine union; for they can bear no proportion to proximate means of union with God, any more than can the bodily imaginings, which serve as objects to the five exterior senses.

4. The reason of this is that the imagination cannot fashion or imagine anything whatsoever beyond that which it has experienced through its exterior senses -- namely, that which it has seen with the eyes, or heard with the ears, etc. At most it can only compose likenesses of those things that it has seen or heard or felt, which are of no more consequence than those which have been received by the senses aforementioned, nor are they even of as much consequence. For, although a man imagines palaces of pearls and mountains of gold, because he has seen gold and pearls, all this is in truth less than the essence of a little gold or of a single pearl, although in the imagination it be greater in quantity and in beauty. And since, as has already been said, no created things can bear any proportion to the Being of God, it follows that nothing that is imagined in their likeness can serve as proximate means to union with Him, but, as we say, quite the contrary.

5. Wherefore those that imagine God beneath any of these figures, or as a great fire or brightness, or in any other such form, and think that anything like this will be like to Him, are very far from approaching Him. For, although these considerations and forms and manners of meditation are necessary to beginners, in order that they may gradually feed and enkindle their souls with love by means of sense, as we shall say hereafter, and although they thus serve them as remote means to union with God, through which a soul has commonly to pass in order to reach the goal and abode of spiritual repose, yet they must merely pass through them, and not remain ever in them, for in such a manner they would never reach their goal, which does not resemble these

---

<sup>293</sup>[*Lit.*, 'by fancying.']

remote means, neither has aught to do with them. The stairs of a staircase have naught to do with the top of it and the abode to which it leads, yet are means to the reaching of both; and if the climber left not behind the stairs below him until there were no more to climb, but desired to remain upon any one of them, he would never reach the top of them nor would he mount to the pleasant<sup>294</sup> and peaceful room which is the goal. And just so the soul that is to attain in this life to the union of that supreme repose and blessing, by means of all these stairs of meditations, forms and ideas, must pass through them and have done with them, since they have no resemblance and bear no proportion to the goal to which they lead, which is God. Wherefore Saint Paul says in the Acts of the Apostles: *Non debemus aestimare, auro, vel argento, aut lapidi sculpturae artis, et cogitationis hominis, Divinum esse similem.*<sup>295</sup> Which signifies: We ought not to think of the Godhead by likening Him to gold or to silver, neither to stone that is formed by art, nor to aught that a man can fashion with his imagination.

6. Great, therefore, is the error of many spiritual persons who have practised approaching God by means of images and forms and meditations, as befits beginners. God would now lead them on to<sup>296</sup> further spiritual blessings, which are interior and invisible, by taking from them the pleasure and sweetness of discursive meditation; but they cannot, or dare not, or know not how to detach themselves from those palpable methods to which they have grown accustomed. They continually labour to retain them, desiring to proceed, as before, by the way of consideration and meditation upon forms, for they think that it must be so with them always. They labour greatly to this end and find little sweetness or none; rather the aridity and weariness and disquiet of their souls are increased and grow, in proportion as they labour for that earlier sweetness. They cannot find this in that earlier manner, for the soul no longer enjoys that food of sense, as we have said; it needs not this but another food, which is more delicate, more interior and partaking less of the nature of sense; it consists not in labouring with the imagination, but in setting the soul at rest, and allowing it to remain in its quiet and repose, which is more spiritual. For, the farther the soul progresses in spirituality, the more it ceases from the operation of the faculties in particular acts, since it becomes more and more occupied in one act that is general and pure; and thus the faculties that were journeying to a place whither the soul has arrived cease to work, even as the feet stop and cease to move when their journey is over. For if all were motion, one would never arrive, and if all were means, where or when would come the fruition of the end and goal?

7. It is piteous, then, to see many a one who<sup>297</sup> though his soul would fain tarry in this peace and rest of interior quiet, where it is filled with the peace and refreshment of God, takes from it its tranquillity, and leads it away to the most exterior things, and would make it return and retrace the ground it has already traversed, to no purpose, and abandon the end and goal wherein it is already reposing for the means which led it to that repose, which are meditations. This comes not to pass without great reluctance and repugnance of the soul, which would fain be in that peace that it understands not, as in its proper place; even as one who has arrived, with great labour, and is now resting,

---

<sup>294</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the level' -- i.e., by contrast with the steep stairs.]

<sup>295</sup>Acts xvii, 29.

<sup>296</sup>[The verb, *recoger*, of which the derived noun is translated 'recollection,' has more accurately the meaning of 'gather,' 'take inwards.']

<sup>297</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to see that there are many who.']

suffers pain if he is made to return to his labour. And, as such souls know not the mystery of this new experience, the idea comes to them that they are being idle and doing nothing; and thus they allow not themselves to be quiet, but endeavor to meditate and reason. Hence they are filled with aridity and affliction, because they seek to find sweetness where it is no longer to be found; we may even say of them that the more they strive the less they profit, for, the more they persist after this manner, the worse is the state wherein they find themselves, because their soul is drawn farther away from spiritual peace; and this is to leave the greater for the less, and to retrace the ground already traversed, and to seek to do that which has been done.

8. To such as these the advice must be given to learn to abide attentively and wait lovingly upon God in that state of quiet, and to pay no heed either to imagination or to its working; for here, as we say, the faculties are at rest, and are working, not actively, but passively, by receiving that which God works in them; and, if they work at times, it is not with violence or with carefully elaborated meditation, but with sweetness of love, moved less by the ability of the soul itself than by God, as will be explained hereafter. But let this now suffice to show how fitting and necessary it is for those who aim at making further progress to be able to detach themselves from all these methods and manners and works of the imagination at the time and season when the profit of the state which they have reached demands and requires it.

9. And, that it may be understood how this is to be, and at what season, we shall give in the chapter following certain signs which the spiritual person will see in himself and whereby he may know at what time and season he may freely avail himself of the goal mentioned above, and may cease from journeying by means of meditation and the work of the imagination.

### CHAPTER XIII

*Wherein are set down the signs which the spiritual person will find in himself whereby he may know at what season it behoves him to leave meditation and reasoning and pass to the state of contemplation.*

IN order that there may be no confusion in this instruction it will be meet in this chapter to explain at what time and season it behoves the spiritual person to lay aside the task of discursive meditation as carried on through the imaginations and forms and figures above mentioned, in order that he may lay them aside neither sooner nor later than when the Spirit bids him; for, although it is meet for him to lay them aside at the proper time in order that he may journey to God and not be hindered by them, it is no less needful for him not to lay aside the said imaginative meditation before the proper time lest he should turn backward. For, although the apprehensions of these faculties serve not as proximate means of union to the proficient, they serve nevertheless as remote means to beginners in order to dispose and habituate the spirit to spirituality by means of sense, and in order to void the sense, in the meantime, of all the other low forms and images, temporal, worldly and natural. We shall therefore speak here of certain signs and examples which the spiritual person will find in himself, whereby he may know whether or not it will be meet for him to lay them aside at this season.

2. The first sign is his realization that he can no longer meditate or reason with his imagination, neither can take pleasure therein as he was wont to do aforetime; he



rather finds aridity in that which aforetime was wont to captivate his senses and to bring him sweetness. But, for as long as he finds sweetness in meditation, and is able to reason, he should not abandon this, save when his soul is led into the peace and quietness<sup>298</sup> which is described under the third head.

3. The second sign is a realization that he has no desire to fix his meditation or his sense upon other particular objects, exterior or interior. I do not mean that the imagination neither comes nor goes (for even at times of deep<sup>299</sup> recollection it is apt to move freely), but that the soul has no pleasure in fixing it of set purpose upon other objects.

4. The third and surest sign is that the soul takes pleasure in being alone, and waits with loving attentiveness upon God, without making any particular meditation, in inward peace and quietness and rest, and without acts and exercises of the faculties -- memory, understanding and will -- at least, without discursive acts, that is, without passing from one thing to another; the soul is alone, with an attentiveness and a knowledge, general and loving, as we said, but without any particular understanding, and adverting not to that which it is contemplating.

5. These three signs, at least, the spiritual person must observe in himself, all together, before he can venture safely to abandon the state of meditation and sense,<sup>300</sup> and to enter that of contemplation and spirit.

6. And it suffices not for a man to have the first alone without the second, for it might be that the reason for his being unable to imagine and meditate upon the things of God, as he did aforetime, was distraction on his part and lack of diligence; for the which cause he must observe in himself the second likewise, which is the absence of inclination or desire to think upon other things; for, when the inability to fix the imagination and sense upon the things of God proceeds from distraction or lukewarmness, the soul then has the desire and inclination to fix it upon other and different things, which lead it thence altogether. Neither does it suffice that he should

---

<sup>298</sup>E.p. omits: 'and quietness.' The Saint's description of this first sign at which a soul should pass from meditation to contemplation was denounced as disagreeing with Catholic doctrine, particularly the phrase: 'that he can no longer meditate or reason with his imagination, neither can take pleasure therein as he was wont to do aforetime.' This language, however, is common to mystics and theologians, not excluding St. Thomas (2a 2ae, q. 180, a. 6) and Suñez (*De Oratione*, Bk. II, Chap. x), as is proved, with eloquence and erudition, by P. Basilio Ponce de León and the *Elucidatio*, in their refutations of the Saint's critics. All agree that, in the act of contemplation of which St. John of the Cross here speaks, the understanding must be stripped of forms and species of the imagination and that the reasonings and reflections of meditation must be set aside. This is to be understood, both of the contemplation that transcends all human methods, and also of that which is practised according to these human methods with the ordinary aid of grace. But there is this important difference, that those who enjoy the first kind of contemplation set aside all intellectual reasoning as well as processes of the fancy and the imagination, whereas, for the second kind, reasoning *prior* to the act of contemplation is normally necessary, though it ceases at the act of contemplation, and there is then substituted for it simple and loving intuition of eternal truth. It should be clearly understood that this is not of habitual occurrence in the contemplative soul, but occurs only *during the act* of contemplation, which is commonly of short duration. St. Teresa makes this clear in Chap. xxvii of her *Life*, and treats this same doctrinal question in many other parts of her works--e.g., *Life*, Chaps. x, xii; *Way of Perfection*, Chap. xxvi; *Interior Castle*, IV, Chap. iii, etc.

<sup>299</sup>[*Lit.*, 'much.']

<sup>300</sup>E.p. omits: 'and sense.' Since sense plays so great a part in meditation, St. John of the Cross places it in contradistinction to contemplation, which, the more nearly it attains perfection, becomes the more sublime and spiritual and the more completely freed from the bonds of nature. Cf. *Elucidatio*, Pt. II, Chap. iii, p. 180.

observe in himself the first and second signs, if he observe not likewise, together with these, the third; for, although he observe his inability to reason and think upon the things of God, and likewise his distaste for thinking upon other and different things, this might proceed from melancholy or from some other kind of humour in the brain or the heart, which habitually produces a certain absorption and suspension of the senses, causing the soul to think not at all, nor to desire or be inclined to think, but rather to remain in that pleasant state of reverie.<sup>301</sup> Against this must be set the third sign, which is loving attentiveness and knowledge, in peace, etc., as we have said.

7. It is true, however, that, when this condition first begins, the soul is hardly aware of this loving knowledge, and that for two reasons. First, this loving knowledge is apt at the beginning to be very subtle and delicate, and almost imperceptible to the senses. Secondly, when the soul has been accustomed to that other exercise of meditation, which is wholly perceptible, it is unaware, and hardly conscious, of this other new and imperceptible condition, which is purely spiritual; especially when, not understanding it, the soul allows not itself to rest in it, but strives after the former, which is more readily perceptible; so that abundant though the loving interior peace may be, the soul has no opportunity of experiencing and enjoying it. But the more accustomed the soul grows to this, by allowing itself to rest, the more it will grow therein and the more conscious it will become of that loving general knowledge of God, in which it has greater enjoyment than in aught else, since this knowledge causes it peace, rest, pleasure and delight without labour.

8. And, to the end that what has been said may be the clearer, we shall give, in this chapter following, the causes and reasons why the three signs aforementioned appear to be necessary for the soul that is journeying to pure spirit.<sup>302</sup>

## CHAPTER XIV

*Wherein is proved the fitness of these signs, and the reason is given why that which has been said in speaking of them is necessary to progress.*

WITH respect to the first sign whereof we are speaking -- that is to say, that the spiritual person who would enter upon the spiritual road (which is that of contemplation) must leave the way of imagination and of meditation through sense when he takes no more pleasure therein and is unable to reason -- there are two reasons why this should be done, which may almost be comprised in one. The first is, that in one way the soul has received all the spiritual good which it would be able to derive from the things of God by the path of meditation and reasoning, the sign whereof is that it can no longer meditate or reason as before, and finds no new sweetness or pleasure therein as it found before, because up to that time it had not progressed as far as the spirituality which was in store for it; for, as a rule, whensoever the soul receives some spiritual blessing, it receives it with pleasure, at least in spirit, in that means whereby it receives it and profits by it; otherwise it is astonishing if it profits by it, or finds in the cause of it that help and that sweetness which it finds when it receives it. For this is in agreement with a

---

<sup>301</sup>[*embelesamiento*, a word denoting a pleasurable condition somewhere between a reverie and a swoon.]

<sup>302</sup>[*Lit.*, 'appear to be necessary in order to journey to spirit.']

saying of the philosophers, *Quod sapit, nutrit*. This is: That which is palatable nourishes and fattens. Wherefore holy Job said: *Numquid poterit comedi insulsum, quod non est sale conditum?*<sup>303</sup> Can that which is unsavory perchance be eaten when it is not seasoned with salt? It is this cause that the soul is unable to meditate or reason as before: the little pleasure which the spirit finds therein and the little profit which it gains.

2. The second reason is that the soul at this season has now both the substance and the habit of the spirit of meditation. For it must be known that the end of reasoning and meditation on the things of God is the gaining of some knowledge and love of God, and each time that the soul gains this through meditation, it is an act; and just as many acts, of whatever kind, end by forming a habit in the soul, just so, many of these acts of loving knowledge which the soul has been making one after another from time to time come through repetition to be so continuous in it that they become habitual. This end God is wont also to effect in many souls without the intervention of these acts (or at least without many such acts having preceded it), by setting them at once in contemplation. And thus that which aforetime the soul was gaining gradually through its labour of meditation upon particular facts has now through practice, as we have been saying, become converted and changed into a habit and substance of loving knowledge, of a general kind, and not distinct or particular as before. Wherefore, when it gives itself to prayer, the soul is now like one to whom water has been brought, so that he drinks peacefully, without labour, and is no longer forced to draw the water through the aqueducts of past meditations and forms and figures<sup>304</sup> So that, as soon as the soul comes before God, it makes an act of knowledge, confused, loving, passive and tranquil, wherein it drinks of wisdom and love and delight.

3. And it is for this cause that the soul feels great weariness and distaste, when, although it is in this condition of tranquillity, men try to make it meditate and labour in particular acts of knowledge. For it is like a child, which, while receiving the milk that has been collected and brought together for it in the breast, is taken from the breast and then forced to try to gain and collect food by its own diligent squeezing and handling. Or it is like one who has removed the rind from a fruit, and is tasting the substance of the fruit, when he is forced to cease doing this and to try to begin removing the said rind, which has been removed already. He finds no rind to remove, and yet he is unable to enjoy the substance of the fruit which he already had in his hand; herein he is like to one who leaves a prize<sup>305</sup> which he holds for another which he holds not.

4. And many act thus when they begin to enter this state; they think that the whole business consists in a continual reasoning and learning to understand particular things by means of images and forms, which are to the spirit as rind. When they find not these in that substantial and loving quiet wherein their soul desires to remain, and wherein it understands nothing clearly, they think that they are going astray and wasting time, and they begin once more to seek the rind of their imaginings and reasonings, but find it not, because it has already been removed. And thus they neither enjoy the substance nor make progress in meditation, and they become troubled by the thought that they are turning backward and are losing themselves. They are indeed losing themselves, though not in the way they think, for they are becoming lost to their own senses and to their first manner of perception; and this means gain in that spirituality

---

<sup>303</sup>Job vi, 6.

<sup>304</sup>[Cf. the simile of the Waters in St. Teresa, *Life*, Chap. xi, and *Interior Castle*, IV, ii, iii.]

<sup>305</sup>[*Lit.*, 'booty,' 'prey.']

which is being given them. The less they understand, however, the farther they penetrate into the night of the spirit, whereof we are treating in this book, through the which night they must pass in order to be united with God, in a union that transcends all knowledge.

5. With respect to the second sign, there is little to say, for it is clear that at this season the soul cannot possibly take pleasure in other and different objects of the imagination, which are of the world, since, as we have said, and for the reasons already mentioned, it has no pleasure in those which are in closest conformity with it -- namely, those of God. Only as has been noted above, the imaginative faculty in this state of recollection is in the habit of coming and going and varying of its own accord; but neither according to the pleasure nor at the will of the soul, which is troubled thereby, because its peace and joy are disturbed.

6. Nor do I think it necessary to say anything here concerning the fitness and necessity of the third sign whereby the soul may know if it is to leave the meditation aforementioned, which is a knowledge of God or a general and loving attentiveness to Him. For something has been said of this in treating of the first sign, and we shall treat of it again hereafter, when we speak in its proper place of this confused and general knowledge, which will come after our description of all the particular apprehensions of the understanding. But we will speak of one reason alone by which it may clearly be seen how, when the contemplative has to turn aside from the way of meditation and reasoning, he needs this general and loving attentiveness or knowledge of God. The reason is that, if the soul at that time had not this knowledge of God or this realization of His presence, the result would be that it would do nothing and have nothing; for, having turned aside from meditation (by means whereof the soul has been reasoning with its faculties of sense), and being still without contemplation, which is the general knowledge whereof we are speaking, wherein the soul makes use of its spiritual faculties<sup>306</sup> -- namely, memory, understanding and will -- these being united in this knowledge which is then wrought and received in them, the soul would of necessity be without any exercise in the things of God, since the soul can neither work, nor can it receive that which has been worked in it, save only by way of these two kinds of faculty, that of sense and that of spirit. For, as we have said, by means of the faculties of sense it can reason and search out and gain knowledge of things and by means of the spiritual faculties it can have fruition of the knowledge which it has already received in these faculties aforementioned, though the faculties themselves take no part herein.

7. And thus the difference between the operation of these two kinds of faculty in the soul is like the difference between working and enjoying the fruit of work which has been done; or like that between the labour of journeying and the rest and quiet which comes from arrival at the goal; or, again, like that between preparing a meal and partaking and tasting of it, when it has been both prepared and masticated, without having any of the labour of cooking it, or it is like the difference between receiving something and profiting by that which has been received. Now if the soul be occupied neither with respect to the operation of the faculties of sense, which is meditation and reasoning, nor with respect to that which has already been received and effected in the spiritual faculties, which is the contemplation and knowledge whereof we have spoken, it will have no occupation, but will be wholly idle, and there would be no way in which it could be said to be employed. This knowledge, then, is needful for the abandonment of

---

<sup>306</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the soul keeps in act its spiritual facilities.']

the way of meditation and reasoning.

8. But here it must be made clear that this general knowledge whereof we are speaking is at times so subtle and delicate, particularly when it is most pure and simple and perfect, most spiritual and most interior, that, although the soul be occupied therein, it can neither realize it nor perceive it. This is most frequently the case when we can say that it is in itself most clear, perfect and simple; and this comes to pass when it penetrates a soul that is unusually pure and far withdrawn from other particular kinds of knowledge and intelligence, which the understanding or the senses might fasten upon. Such a soul, since it no longer has those things wherein the understanding and the senses have the habit and custom of occupying themselves, is not conscious of them, inasmuch as it has not its accustomed powers of sense. And it is for this reason that, when this knowledge is purest and simplest and most perfect, the understanding is least conscious of it and thinks of it as most obscure. And similarly, in contrary wise, when it is in itself least pure and simple in the understanding, it seems to the understanding to be clearest and of the greatest importance, since it is clothed in, mingled with or involved in certain intelligible forms which understanding or sense may seize upon.<sup>307</sup>

9. This will be clearly understood by the following comparison. If we consider a ray of sunlight entering through a window, we see that, the more the said ray is charged with atoms and particles of matter, the more palpable, visible and bright it appears to the eye of sense;<sup>308</sup> yet it is clear that the ray is in itself least pure, clear, simple and perfect at that time, since it is full of so many particles and atoms. And we see likewise that, when it is purest and freest from those particles and atoms, the least palpable and the darkest does it appear to the material eye; and the purer it is, the darker and less apprehensible it appears to it. And if the ray were completely pure and free from all these atoms and particles, even from the minutest specks of dust, it would appear completely dark and invisible to the eye, since everything that could be seen would be absent from it -- namely, the objects of sight. For the eye would find no objects whereon to rest, since light is no proper object of vision, but the means whereby that which is visible is seen; so that, if there be no visible objects wherein the sun's ray or any light can be reflected, nothing will be seen. Wherefore, if the ray of light entered by one window and went out by another, without meeting anything that has material form, it would not be seen at all; yet, notwithstanding, that ray of light would be purer and clearer in itself than when it was more clearly seen and perceived through being full of visible objects.

10. The same thing happens in the realm of spiritual light with respect to the sight of the soul, which is the understanding, and which this general and supernatural knowledge and light whereof we are speaking strikes so purely and simply. So completely is it detached and removed from all intelligible forms, which are objects of the understanding, that it is neither perceived nor observed. Rather, at times (that is, when it is purest), it becomes darkness, because it withdraws the understanding from its accustomed lights, from forms and from fancies, and then the darkness is more clearly felt and realized. But, when this Divine light strikes the soul with less force, it neither perceives darkness nor observes light, nor apprehends aught that it knows, from

---

<sup>307</sup>[The verb is *tropezar en*, which may mean either 'stumble upon' -- i.e., 'come across (and make use of),' or 'stumble over' -- i.e., the forms may be a stumbling-block, or a snare. I think there is at least a suggestion of the latter meaning.]

<sup>308</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to the sight of sense.']

whatever source; hence at times the soul remains as it were in a great forgetfulness, so that it knows not where it has been or what it has done, nor is it aware of the passage of time. Wherefore it may happen, and does happen, that many hours are spent in this forgetfulness, and, when the soul returns to itself, it believes that less than a moment has passed, or no time at all.

11. The cause of this forgetfulness is the purity and simplicity of this knowledge which occupies the soul and simplifies, purifies and cleanses it from all apprehensions and forms of the senses and of the memory, through which it acted when it was conscious of time,<sup>309</sup> and thus leaves it in forgetfulness and without consciousness of time.<sup>310</sup> This prayer, therefore, seems to the soul extremely brief, although, as we say, it may last for a long period; for the soul has been united in pure intelligence, which belongs not to time; and this is the brief prayer which is said to pierce the heavens, because it is brief and because it belongs not to time.<sup>311</sup> And it pierces the heavens, because the soul is united in heavenly intelligence; and when the soul awakens, this knowledge leaves in it the effects which it created in it without its being conscious of them, which effects are the lifting up of the spirit to the heavenly intelligence, and its withdrawal and abstraction from all things and forms and figures and memories thereof. It is this that David describes as having happened to him when he returned to himself out of this same forgetfulness, saying: *Vigilavi, et factus sum sicut passer solitarius in tecto*.<sup>312</sup> Which signifies: I have watched and I have become like the lonely bird<sup>313</sup> on the house-top. He uses the word 'lonely' to indicate that he was withdrawn and abstracted from all things. And by the house-top he means the elevation of the spirit on high; so that the soul remains as though ignorant of all things, for it knows God only, without knowing how. Wherefore the Bride declares in the Songs that among the effects which that sleep and forgetfulness of hers produced was this unknowing. She says that she came down to the garden, saying: *Nescivi*.<sup>314</sup> That is: I knew not whence. Although, as we have said, the soul in this state of knowledge believes itself to be doing nothing, and to be entirely unoccupied, because it is working neither with the senses nor with the faculties, it should realize that it is not wasting time. For, although the harmony of the faculties of the soul may cease, its intelligence is as we have said. For this cause the

---

<sup>309</sup>[Or: 'when it was dependent on time.' *Lit.*, 'acted in time.']

<sup>310</sup>[Or: 'and independent of time.' *Lit.*, 'without time.']

<sup>311</sup>E.p. modifies these lines thus: '... it has been in pure intelligence, which is the brief prayer that is said to pierce the heavens. Because it is brief and because the soul is not conscious or observant of time.' P. JosŽ de Jesœs Mar'a comments thus upon this passage: 'In contemplation the soul withdraws itself from the seashore, and entirely loses sight of land, in order to whelm itself in that vast sea and impenetrable abyss of the Divine Essence; hiding itself in the region of time, it enters within the most extensive limits of eternity. For the pure and simple intelligence whereinto the soul is brought in this contemplation, as was pointed out by the ancient Dionysius (*Myst. Theol.*, Chap. ii), and by our own Father, is not subject to time. For, as St. Thomas says (Pt. I, q. 118, a. 3, *et alibi*), the soul is a spiritual substance, which is above time and superior to the movements of the heavens, to which it is subject only because of the body. And therefore it seems that, when the soul withdraws from the body, and from all created things, and by means of pure intelligence whelms itself in eternal things, it recovers its natural dominion and rises above time, if not according to substance, at least according to its most perfect being; for the noblest and most perfect being of the soul resides rather in its acts than in its faculties. Wherefore St. Gregory said (*Morals*, Bk. VIII): "The Saints enter eternity even in this life, beholding the eternity of God."

<sup>312</sup>Psalm ci, 8 [A.V. cii, 7].

<sup>313</sup>[The Spanish *pájaro*, 'bird,' is derived from *passer*, 'sparrow.']

<sup>314</sup>Canticles vi, 11.

Bride, who was wise, answered this question herself in the Songs, saying: *Ego dormio et cor meum vigilat*.<sup>315</sup> As though she were to say: Although I sleep with respect to my natural self, ceasing to labour, my heart waketh, being supernaturally lifted up in supernatural knowledge.<sup>316</sup>

12. But, it must be realized, we are not to suppose that this knowledge necessarily causes this forgetfulness when the soul is in the state that we are here describing: this occurs only when God suspends in the soul the exercise of all its faculties, both natural and spiritual, which happens very seldom, for this knowledge does not always fill the soul entirely. It is sufficient for the purpose, in the case which we are treating, that the understanding should be withdrawn from all particular knowledge, whether temporal or spiritual, and that the will should not desire to think with respect to either, as we have said, for this is a sign that the soul is occupied. And it must be taken as an indication that this is so when this knowledge is applied and communicated to the understanding only, which sometimes happens when the soul is unable to observe it. For, when it is communicated to the will also, which happens almost invariably, the soul does not cease to understand in the very least degree, if it will reflect hereon, that it is employed and occupied in this knowledge, inasmuch as it is conscious of a sweetness of love therein, without particular knowledge or understanding of that which it loves. It is for this reason that this knowledge is described as general and loving; for, just as it is so in the understanding, being communicated to it obscurely, even so is it in the will, sweetness and love being communicated to it confusedly, so that it cannot have a distinct knowledge of the object of its love.

13. Let this suffice now to explain how meet it is that the soul should be occupied in this knowledge, so that it may turn aside from the way of spiritual meditation, and be sure that, although it seem to be doing nothing, it is well occupied, if it discern within itself these signs. It will also be realized, from the comparison which we have made, that if this light presents itself to the understanding in a more comprehensible and palpable manner, as the sun's ray presents itself to the eye when it is full of particles, the soul must not for that reason consider it purer, brighter and more sublime. It is clear that, as Aristotle and the theologians say, the higher and more sublime is the Divine light, the darker is it to our understanding.

---

<sup>315</sup>Canticles v, 2.

<sup>316</sup>The words which conclude this paragraph in the edition of 1630 ('The sign by which we may know if the soul is occupied in this secret intelligence is if it is seen to have no pleasure in thinking of aught, whether high or low') are not found either in the Codices or in e.p. When St. John of the Cross uses the words 'cessation,' 'idleness' [*ocio*, Lat. *otium*], 'quiet,' 'annihilation,' 'sleep' (of the faculties), etc., he does not mean, as the Illuminists did, that the understanding and will in the act of contemplation are so passive as to have lost all their force and vitality, and that the contemplative is therefore impeccable, although he commit the grossest sins. The soul's vital powers, according to St. John of the Cross, are involved even in the highest contemplation; the understanding is attentive to God and the will is loving Him. They are not working, it is true, in the way which is usual and natural with them -- that is, by reason and imagination -- but supernaturally, through the unction of the Holy Spirit, which they receive passively, without any effort of their own. It is in this sense that such words as those quoted above ('cessation,' 'idleness,' etc.) are both expressively and appropriately used by the Saint, for what is done without labour and effort may better be described by images of passivity than by those of activity. Further, the soul is unaware that its faculties are working in this sublime contemplation, though they undoubtedly do work.

St. John of the Cross, philosopher as well as mystic, would not deny the vital and intrinsic activity of the understanding and the will in contemplation. His reasoning is supported by P. JosŽ de Jesœs Mar'a (*Apologia Mística de la Contemplaci—n Divina*, Chap. ix) [quoted at length by P. Silverio, *Obras*, etc., Vol. II, p. 130, note].

14. Of this Divine knowledge there is much to say, concerning both itself and the effects which it produces upon contemplatives. All this we reserve for its proper place,<sup>317</sup> for, although we have spoken of it here, there would be no reason for having done so at such length, save our desire not to leave this doctrine rather more confused than it is already, for I confess it is certainly very much so. Not only is it a matter which is seldom treated in this way, either verbally or in writing, being in itself so extraordinary and obscure, but my rude style and lack of knowledge make it more so. Further, since I have misgivings as to my ability to explain it, I believe I often write at too great length and go beyond the limits which are necessary for that part of the doctrine which I am treating. Herein I confess that I sometimes err purposely; for that which is not explicable by one kind of reasoning will perhaps be better understood by another, or by others yet; and I believe, too, that in this way I am shedding more light upon that which is to be said hereafter.

15. Wherefore it seems well to me also, before completing this part of my treatise, to set down a reply to one question which may arise with respect to the continuance of this knowledge, and this shall be briefly treated in the chapter following.

## CHAPTER XV

*Wherein is explained how it is sometimes well for progressives who are beginning to enter upon this general knowledge of contemplation to make use of natural reasoning and the work of the natural faculties.*

WITH regard to that which has been said, there might be raised one question -- if progressives (that is, those whom God is beginning to bring into this supernatural knowledge of contemplation whereof we have spoken) must never again, because of this that they are beginning to experience, return to the way of meditation and reasoning and natural forms. To this the answer is that it is not to be understood that such as are beginning to experience this loving knowledge must, as a general rule, never again try to return to meditation; for, when they are first making progress in proficiency, the habit of contemplation is not yet so perfect that they can give themselves to the act thereof whensoever they wish, nor, in the same way, have they reached a point so far beyond meditation that they cannot occasionally meditate and reason in a natural way, as they were wont, using the figures and the steps that they were wont to use, and finding something new in them. Rather, in these early stages, when, by means of the indications already given, they are able to see that the soul is not occupied in that repose and knowledge, they will need to make use of meditation until by means of it they come to acquire in some degree of perfection the habit which we have described. This will happen when, as soon as they seek to meditate, they experience this knowledge and peace, and find themselves unable to meditate and no longer desirous of doing so, as we have said. For until they reach this stage, which is that of the proficient in this exercise, they use sometimes the one and sometimes the other, at different times.

2. The soul, then, will frequently find itself in this loving or peaceful state of

---

<sup>317</sup>In spite of this promise, the Saint does not return to this subject at such length as his language here would suggest.



waiting upon God<sup>318</sup> without in any way exercising its faculties -- that is, with respect to particular acts -- and without working actively at all, but only receiving. In order to reach this state, it will frequently need to make use of meditation, quietly and in moderation; but, when once the soul is brought into this other state, it acts not at all with its faculties, as we have already said. It would be truer to say that understanding and sweetness work in it and are wrought within it, than that the soul itself works at all, save only by waiting upon God and by loving Him without desiring to feel or to see anything. Then God communicates Himself to it passively, even as to one who has his eyes open, so that light is communicated to him passively, without his doing more than keep them open. And this reception of light which is infused supernaturally is passive understanding. We say that the soul works not at all, not because it understands not, but because it understands things without taxing its own industry and receives only that which is given to it, as comes to pass in the illuminations and enlightenments or inspirations of God.

3. Although in this condition the will freely receives this general and confused knowledge of God, it is needful, in order that it may receive this Divine light more simply and abundantly, only that it should not try to interpose other lights which are more palpable, whether forms or ideas or figures having to do with any kind of meditation; for none of these things is similar to that pure and serene light. So that if at this time the will desires to understand and consider particular things, however spiritual they be, this would obstruct the pure and simple general light of the spirit, by setting those clouds in the way; even as a man might set something before his eyes which impeded his vision and kept from him both the light and the sight of things in front of him.

4. Hence it clearly follows that, when the soul has completely purified and voided itself of all forms and images that can be apprehended, it will remain in this pure and simple light, being transformed therein into a state of perfection. For, though this light never fails in the soul, it is not infused into it because of the creature forms and veils wherewith the soul is veiled and embarrassed; but, if these impediments and these veils were wholly removed (as will be said hereafter), the soul would then find itself in a condition of pure detachment and poverty of spirit, and, being simple and pure, would be transformed into simple and pure Wisdom, which is the Son of God. For the enamoured soul finds that that which is natural has failed it, and it is then imbued with that which is Divine, both naturally and supernaturally, so that there may be no vacuum in its nature.

5. When the spiritual person cannot meditate, let him learn to be still in God, fixing his loving attention upon Him, in the calm of his understanding, although he may think himself to be doing nothing. For thus, little by little and very quickly, Divine calm and peace will be infused into his soul, together with a wondrous and sublime knowledge of God, enfolded in Divine love. And let him not meddle with forms, meditations and imaginings, or with any kind of reasoning, lest his soul be disturbed, and brought out of its contentment and peace, which can only result in its experiencing distaste and repugnance. And if, as we have said, such a person has scruples that he is doing nothing, let him note that he is doing no small thing by pacifying the soul and bringing it into calm and peace, unaccompanied by any act or desire, for it is this that Our Lord asks of us, through David, saying: *Vacate, et videte quoniam ego sum*

---

<sup>318</sup>[*Lit.*, 'in this loving or peaceful presence,' the original of 'presence' having also the sense of 'attendance.']

*Deus.*<sup>319</sup> As though he had said: Learn to be empty of all things (that is to say, inwardly and outwardly) and you will see that I am God.

## CHAPTER XVI

*Which treats of the imaginary apprehensions that are supernaturally represented in the fancy. Describing how they cannot serve the soul as a proximate means to union with God.*

NOW that we have treated of the apprehensions which the soul can receive within itself by natural means, and whereon the fancy and the imagination can work by means of reflection, it will be suitable to treat here of the supernatural apprehensions, which are called imaginary visions, which likewise belong to these senses, since they come within the category of images, forms and figures, exactly as do the natural apprehensions.

2. It must be understood that beneath this term 'imaginary vision' we purpose to include all things which can be represented to the imagination supernaturally by means of any image, form, figure and species. For all the apprehensions and species which, through all the five bodily senses, are represented to the soul, and dwell within it, after a natural manner, may likewise occur in the soul after a supernatural manner, and be represented to it without any assistance of the outward senses. For this sense of fancy, together with memory, is, as it were, an archive and storehouse of the understanding, wherein are received all forms and images that can be understood; and thus the soul has them within itself as it were in a mirror, having received them by means of the five senses, or, as we say, supernaturally; and thus it presents them to the understanding, whereupon the understanding considers them and judges them. And not only so, but the soul can also prepare and imagine others like to those with which it is acquainted.

3. It must be understood, then, that, even as the five outward senses represent the images and species of their objects to these inward senses, even so, supernaturally, as we say, without using the outward senses, both God and the devil can represent the same images and species, and much more beautiful and perfect ones. Wherefore, beneath these images, God often represents many things to the soul, and teaches it much wisdom; this is continually seen in the Scriptures, as when Isaias saw God in His glory beneath the smoke which covered the Temple, and beneath the seraphim who covered their faces and their feet with wings;<sup>320</sup> and as Jeremias saw the rod watching,<sup>321</sup> and Daniel a multitude of visions,<sup>322</sup> etc. And the devil, too, strives to deceive the soul with his visions, which in appearance are good, as may be seen in the Book of the Kings, when he deceived all the prophets of Achab, presenting to their imaginations the horns wherewith he said the King was to destroy the Assyrians, which was a lie.<sup>323</sup> Even such were the visions of Pilate's wife, warning him not to condemn Christ;<sup>324</sup> and there are many other places where it is seen how, in this mirror of the

---

<sup>319</sup>Psalm xlv, 11 [A.V., xlvi, 10].

<sup>320</sup>Isaias vi, 4.

<sup>321</sup>Jeremias i, 11.

<sup>322</sup>Daniel viii, 10.

<sup>323</sup>Kings xxii, 11 [A.V., 1 Kings xxii, 11].

<sup>324</sup>[St. Matthew xxvii, 19.]

fancy and the imagination, these imaginary visions come more frequently to proficients than do outward and bodily visions. These, as we say, differ not in their nature (that is, as being images and species) from those which enter by the outward senses; but, with respect to the effect which they produce, and in the degree of their perfection, there is a great difference; for imaginary visions are subtler and produce a deeper impression upon the soul, inasmuch as they are supernatural, and are also more interior than the exterior supernatural visions. Nevertheless, it is true that some of these exterior bodily visions may produce a deeper impression; the communication, after all, is as God wills. We are speaking, however, merely as concerns their nature, and in this respect they are more spiritual.

4. It is to these senses of imagination and fancy that the devil habitually betakes himself with his wiles -- now natural, now supernatural;<sup>325</sup> for they are the door and entrance to the soul, and here, as we have said, the understanding comes to take up or set down its goods, as it were in a harbour or in a store-house where it keeps its provisions. And for this reason it is hither that both God and the devil always come with their jewels of supernatural forms and images, to offer them to the understanding; although God does not make use of this means alone to instruct the soul, but dwells within it in substance, and is able to do this by Himself and by other methods.

5. There is no need for me to stop here in order to give instruction concerning the signs by which it may be known which visions are of God and which not, and which are of one kind and which of another; for this is not my intention, which is only to instruct the understanding herein, that it may not be hindered or impeded as to union with Divine Wisdom by the good visions, neither may be deceived by those which are false.

6. I say, then, that with regard to all these imaginary visions and apprehensions and to all other forms and species whatsoever, which present themselves beneath some particular kind of knowledge or image or form, whether they be false and come from the devil or are recognized as true and coming from God, the understanding must not be embarrassed by them or feed upon them, neither must the soul desire to receive them or to have them, lest it should no longer be detached, free, pure and simple, without any mode or manner, as is required for union.

7. The reason of this is that all these forms which we have already mentioned are always represented, in the apprehension of the soul, as we have said, beneath certain modes and manners which have limitations; and that the Wisdom of God, wherewith the understanding is to be united, has no mode or manner, neither is it contained within any particular or distinct kind of intelligence or limit, because it is wholly pure and simple. And as, in order that these two extremes may be united -- namely, the soul and Divine Wisdom -- it will be necessary for them to attain to agreement, by means of a certain mutual resemblance, hence it follows that the soul must be pure and simple, neither bounded by, nor attached to, any particular kind of intelligence, nor modified by any limitation of form, species and image. As God comes not within any image or form, neither is contained within any particular kind of intelligence, so the soul, in order to reach God,<sup>326</sup> must likewise come within no distinct form or kind of intelligence.

8. And that there is no form or likeness in God is clearly declared by the Holy

---

<sup>325</sup>E.p. omits: 'now natural, now supernatural.' The Saint employs this last word, in this passage, with the sense of 'preternatural.' Only God can transcend the bounds of nature, but the devil can act in such a way that he appears to be doing so, counterfeiting miracles, and so forth.

<sup>326</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to come within God.'] E.p.: 'to be united with God.'

Spirit in Deuteronomy, where He says: *Vocem verborum ejus audistis, et formam penitus non vidistis.*<sup>327</sup> Which signifies: Ye heard the voice of His words, and ye saw in God no form whatsoever. But He says that there was darkness there, and clouds and thick darkness, which are the confused and dark knowledge whereof we have spoken, wherein the soul is united with God. And afterwards He says further: *Non vidistis aliquam similitudinem in die, qua locutus est vobis Dominus in Horeb de medio ignis.* That is: Ye saw no likeness in God upon the day when He spoke to you on Mount Horeb, out of the midst of the fire.<sup>328</sup>

9. And that the soul cannot reach the height of God, even as far as is possible in this life, by means of any form and figure, is declared likewise by the same Holy Spirit in the Book of Numbers, where God reproves Aaron and Miriam, the brother and sister of Moses, because they murmured against him, and, desiring to convey to them the loftiness of the state of union and friendship with Him wherein He had placed him, said: *Si quis inter vos fuerit Propheta Domini, in visione apparebo ei, vel per somnium loquar ad illum. At non talis servus meus Moyses, qui in omni domo mea fidelissimus est: ore enim ad os loquor ei, et palem, et non per aenigmata, et figuras Dominum videt.*<sup>329</sup> Which signifies: If there be any prophet of the Lord among you, I will appear to him in some vision or form, or I will speak with him in his dreams; but there is none like My servant Moses, who is the most faithful in all My house, and I speak with him mouth to mouth, and he sees not God by comparisons, similitudes and figures. Herein He says clearly that, in this lofty state of union whereof we are speaking, God is not communicated to the soul by means of any disguise of imaginary vision or similitude or form, neither can He be so communicated; but mouth to mouth -- that is, in the naked and pure essence of God, which is the mouth of God in love, with the naked and pure essence of the soul, which is the mouth of the soul in love of God.

10. Wherefore, in order to come to this essential union of love in God, the soul must have a care not to lean upon<sup>330</sup> imaginary visions, nor upon forms or figures or particular objects of the understanding; for these cannot serve it as a proportionate and proximate means to such an end; rather they would disturb it, and for this reason the soul must renounce them and strive not to have them. For if in any circumstances they were to be received and prized, it would be for the sake of profit which true visions bring to the soul and the good effect which they produce upon it. But, for this to happen, it is not necessary to receive them; indeed, for the soul's profit, it is well always to reject them. For these imaginary visions, like the outward bodily visions whereof we have spoken, do the soul good by communicating to it intelligence or love or sweetness; but for this effect to be produced by them in the soul it is not necessary that it should desire to receive them; for, as has also been said above, at this very time when they are present to the imagination, they produce in the soul and infuse into it intelligence and love, or sweetness, or whatever effect God wills them to produce. And not only do they produce this joint effect, but principally, although not simultaneously, they produce their effect in the soul passively, without its being able to hinder this effect, even if it so desired, just as it was also powerless to acquire it, although it had been able previously to prepare itself. For, even as the window is powerless to impede the ray of sunlight

---

<sup>327</sup>Deuteronomy iv, 12.

<sup>328</sup>Deuteronomy iv, 15.

<sup>329</sup>Numbers xii, 6-8, [D.V. has 'Mary' for 'Miriam'.]

<sup>330</sup>[The progressive form is used in the Spanish: 'not to go (or 'be') leaning upon.']

which strikes it, but, when it is prepared by being cleansed, receives its light passively without any diligence or labour on its own part, even so the soul, although against its will, cannot fail to receive in itself the influences and communications of those figures, however much it might desire to resist them. For the will that is negatively inclined cannot, if coupled with loving and humble resignation, resist supernatural infusions; only the impurity and imperfections of the soul can resist them even as the stains upon a window impede the brightness of the sunlight.<sup>331</sup>

11. From this it is evident that, when the soul completely detaches itself, in its will and affection, from the apprehensions of the strains of those forms, images and figures wherein are clothed the spiritual communications which we have described, not only is it not deprived of these communications and the blessings which they cause within it, but it is much better prepared to receive them with greater abundance, clearness, liberty of spirit and simplicity, when all these apprehensions are set on one side, for they are, as it were, curtains and veils covering the spiritual thing that is behind them. And thus, if the soul desire to feed upon them, they occupy spirit and sense in such a way that the spirit cannot communicate itself simply and freely; for, while they are still occupied with the outer rind, it is clear that the understanding is not free to receive the substance. Wherefore, if the soul at that time desires to receive these forms and to set store by them, it would be embarrassing itself, and contenting itself with the least important part of them -- namely, all that it can apprehend and know of them, which is the form and image and particular object of the understanding in question. The most important part of them, which is the spiritual part that is infused into the soul, it can neither apprehend nor understand, nor can it even know what it is, or be able to express it, since it is purely spiritual. All that it can know of them, as we say, according to its manner of understanding, is but the least part of what is in them -- namely, the forms perceptible by sense. For this reason I say that what it cannot understand or imagine is communicated to it by these visions, passively, without any effort of its own to understand and without its even knowing how to make such an effort.

12. Wherefore the eyes of the soul must ever be withdrawn from all these apprehensions which it can see and understand distinctly, which are communicated through sense, and do not make for a foundation of faith, or for reliance on faith, and must be set upon that which it sees not, and which belongs not to sense, but to spirit, which can be expressed by no figure of sense; and it is this which leads the soul to union in faith, which is the true medium, as has been said. And thus these visions will profit the soul substantially, in respect of faith, when it is able to renounce the sensible and intelligible part of them, and to make good use of the purpose for which God gives them to the soul, by casting them aside; for, as we said of corporeal visions, God gives them not so that the soul may desire to have them and to set its affection upon them.

13. But there arises here this question: If it be true that God gives the soul supernatural visions, but not so that it may desire to have them or be attached to them or set store by them, why does He give them at all, since by their means the soul may fall into many errors and perils, or at the least may find in them such hindrances to further progress as are here described, especially since God can come to the soul, and communicate to it, spiritually and substantially, that which He communicates to it through sense, by means of the sensible forms and visions aforementioned?

14. We shall answer this question in the following chapter: it involves important

---

<sup>331</sup>[*Lit.*, 'impede the brightness.']

teaching, most necessary, as I see it, both to spiritual persons and to those who instruct them. For herein is taught the way and purpose of God with respect to these visions, which many know not, so that they cannot rule themselves or guide themselves to union, neither can they guide others to union, through these visions. For they think that, just because they know them to be true and to come from God, it is well to receive them and to trust them, not realizing that the soul will become attached to them, cling to them and be hindered by them, as it will by things of the world, if it know not how to renounce these as well as those. And thus they think it well to receive one kind of vision and to reject another, causing themselves, and the souls under their care, great labour and peril in discerning between the truth and the falsehood of these visions. But God does not command them to undertake this labour, nor does He desire that sincere and simple souls should be led into this conflict and danger; for they have safe and sound teaching, which is that of the faith, wherein they can go forward.

15. This, however, cannot be unless they close their eyes to all that is of particular and clear intelligence and sense. For, although Saint Peter was quite certain of that vision of glory which he saw in Christ at the Transfiguration, yet, after having described it in his second canonical Epistle, he desired not that it should be taken for an important and sure testimony, but rather directed his hearers to faith, saying: *Et habemus firmiorem propheticum sermonem: cui benefacitis attendentes, quasi lucernae lucenti in caliginoso loco, donec dies elucescat.*<sup>332</sup> Which signifies: And we have a surer testimony than this vision of Tabor -- namely, the sayings and words of the prophets who bear testimony to Christ, whereunto ye must indeed cling, as to a candle which gives light in a dark place. If we will think upon this comparison, we shall find therein the teaching which we are now expounding. For, in telling us to look to the faith whereof the prophets spake, as to a candle that shines in a dark place, he is bidding us remain in the darkness, with our eyes closed to all these other lights; and telling us that in this darkness, faith alone, which likewise is dark, will be the light to which we shall cling; for if we desire to cling to these other bright lights -- namely, to distinct objects of the understanding -- we cease to cling to that dark light, which is faith, and we no longer have that light in the dark place whereof Saint Peter speaks. This place, which here signifies the understanding, which is the candlestick wherein this candle of faith is set, must be dark until the day when the clear vision of God dawns upon it in the life to come, or, in this life, until the day of transformation and union with God to which the soul is journeying.

## CHAPTER XVII

*Wherein is described the purpose and manner of God in His communication of spiritual blessings to the soul by means of the senses. Herein is answered the question which has been referred to.*

THERE is much to be said concerning the purpose of God, and concerning the manner wherein He gives these visions in order to raise up the soul from its lowly estate to His Divine union. All spiritual books deal with this and in this treatise of ours the method which we pursue is to explain it; therefore I shall only say in this chapter as much as is

---

<sup>332</sup>St. Peter i, 19.

necessary to answer our question, which was as follows: Since in these supernatural visions there is so much hindrance and peril to progress, as we have said, why does God, Who is most wise and desires to remove stumbling-blocks and snares from the soul, offer and communicate them to it?

2. In order to answer this, it is well first of all to set down three fundamental points. The first is from Saint Paul *ad Romanos*, where he says: *Quae autem sunt, a Deo ordinatae sunt*.<sup>333</sup> Which signifies: The works that are done are ordained of God. The second is from the Holy Spirit in the Book of Wisdom, where He says: *Disponit omnia suaviter*.<sup>334</sup> And this is as though He had said: The wisdom of God, although it extends from one end to another -- that is to say, from one extreme to another -- orders all things with sweetness. The third is from the theologians, who say that *Omnia movet secundum modum eorum*. That is, God moves all things according to their nature.

3. It is clear, then, from these fundamental points, that if God is to move the soul and to raise it up from the extreme depth of its lowliness to the extreme height of His loftiness, in Divine union with Him, He must do it with order and sweetness and according to the nature of the soul itself. Then, since the order whereby the soul acquires knowledge is through forms and images of created things, and the natural way wherein it acquires this knowledge and wisdom is through the senses, it follows that, if God is to raise up the soul to supreme knowledge, and to do so with sweetness, He must begin to work from the lowest and extreme end of the senses of the soul, in order that He may gradually lead it, according to its own nature, to the other extreme of His spiritual wisdom, which belongs not to sense. Wherefore He first leads it onward by instructing it through forms, images and ways of sense, according to its own method of understanding, now naturally, now supernaturally, and by means of reasoning, to this supreme Spirit of God.

4. It is for this reason that God gives the soul visions and forms, images and other kinds of sensible and intelligible knowledge of a spiritual nature; not that God would not give it spiritual wisdom immediately, and all at once, if the two extremes -- which are human and Divine, sense and spirit -- could in the ordinary way concur and unite in one single act, without the previous intervention of many other preparatory acts which concur among themselves in order and sweetness, and are a basis and a preparation one for another, like natural agents; so that the first acts serve the second, the second the third, and so onward, in exactly the same way. And thus God brings man to perfection according to the way of man's own nature, working from what is lowest and most exterior up to what is most interior and highest. First, then, He perfects his bodily senses, impelling him to make use of good things which are natural, perfect and exterior, such as hearing sermons and masses, looking on holy things, mortifying the palate at meals and chastening the sense of touch by penance and holy rigour. And, when these senses are in some degree prepared, He is wont to perfect them still further, by bestowing on them certain supernatural favours and gifts, in order to confirm them the more completely in that which is good, offering them certain supernatural communications, such as visions of saints or holy things, in corporeal shape, the sweetest perfumes, locutions, and exceeding great delights of touch, wherewith sense is greatly continued in virtue and is withdrawn from a desire for evil things. And besides this He continues at the same time to perfect the interior bodily senses, whereof we are

---

<sup>333</sup>Romans xiii, 1.

<sup>334</sup>Wisdom viii, 1.

here treating, such as imagination and fancy, and to habituate them to that which is good, by means of considerations, meditations, and reflections of a sacred kind, in all of which He is instructing the spirit. And, when these are prepared by this natural exercise, God is wont to enlighten and spiritualize them still more by means of certain supernatural visions, which are those that we are here calling imaginary; wherein, as we have said, the spirit, at the same time, profits greatly, for both kinds of vision help to take away its grossness and gradually to reform it. And after this manner God continues to lead the soul step by step till it reaches that which is the most interior of all; not that it is always necessary for Him to observe this order, and to cause the soul to advance exactly in this way, from the first step to the last; sometimes He allows the soul to attain one stage and not another, or leads it from the more interior to the less, or effects two stages of progress together. This happens when God sees it to be meet for the soul, or when He desires to grant it His favours in this way; nevertheless His ordinary method is as has been said.

5. It is in this way, then, that God instructs<sup>335</sup> the soul and makes it more spiritual, communicating spirituality to it first of all by means of outward and palpable things, adapted to sense, on account of the soul's feebleness and incapacity, so that, by means of the outer husk of those things which in themselves are good, the spirit may make<sup>336</sup> particular acts and receive so many spiritual communications<sup>337</sup> that it may form a habit as to things spiritual, and may acquire actual and substantial spirituality, which is completely removed from every sense. To this, as we have said, the soul cannot attain except very gradually, and in its own way -- that is, by means of sense -- to which it has ever been attached. And thus, in proportion as the spirit attains more nearly to converse with God, it becomes ever more detached and emptied of the ways of sense, which are those of imaginary meditation and reflection. Wherefore, when the soul attains perfectly to spiritual converse with God, it must of necessity have been voided of all that relates to God and yet might come under the head of sense. Even so, the more closely a thing grows attracted to one extreme, the farther removed and withdrawn<sup>338</sup> it becomes from the other; and, when it comes to rest perfectly in the one, it will also have withdrawn itself perfectly from the other. Wherefore there is a commonly quoted spiritual adage which says: *Gustato spiritu, desipit omni caro*. Which signifies: After the taste and sweetness of the spirit have been experienced, everything carnal is insipid. That is: No profit or enjoyment is afforded by all the ways of the flesh, wherein is included all communication of sense with the spiritual. And this is clear: for, if it is spirit, it has no more to do with sense; and, if sense can comprehend it, it is no longer pure spirit. For, the more can be known of it by natural apprehension and sense, the less it has of spirit and of the supernatural, as has been explained above.

6. The spirit that has become perfect, therefore, pays no heed to sense, nor does it receive anything through sense, nor make any great use of it, neither does it need to do so, in its relations with God, as it did aforetime when it had not grown spiritually. It is this that is signified by that passage from Saint Paul's Epistle to the Corinthians which says: *Cum essem parvulus, loquebar ut parvulus, sapiebam ut parvulus, cogitabam ut*

---

<sup>335</sup>[The verb is progressive ('goes (on) instructing').]

<sup>336</sup>[This verb also is progressive: 'may go (on) making'.]

<sup>337</sup>[*Lit.*, 'mouthfuls of spiritual communication'.]

<sup>338</sup>[All the verbs in the last two clauses are in the progressive form.]



*parvulus. Quando autem factus sum vir, evacuavi quae erant parvuli.*<sup>339</sup> This signifies: When I was a child, I spake as a child, I knew as a child, I thought as a child; but, when I became a man, I put away<sup>340</sup> childish things. We have already explained how the things of sense, and the knowledge that spirit can derive from them, are the business of a child. Thus, if the soul should desire to cling to them for ever, and not to throw them aside, it would never be aught but a little child; it would speak ever of God as a child, and would know of God as a child, and would think of God as a child; for, clinging to the outer husk of sense, which pertains to the child, it would never attain to the substance of the spirit, which pertains to the perfect man. And thus the soul must not desire to receive the said revelations in order to continue in growth, even though God offer them to it, just as the child must leave the breast in order to accustom its palate to strong meat, which is more substantial.

7. You will ask, then, if, when the soul is immature, it must take these things, and, when it is grown, must abandon them; even as an infant must take the breast, in order to nourish itself, until it be older and can leave it. I answer that, with respect to meditation and natural reflection by means of which the soul begins to seek God, it is true that it must not leave the breast of sense in order to continue taking in nourishment until the time and season to leave it have arrived, and this comes when God brings the soul into a more spiritual communion, which is contemplation, concerning which we gave instruction in the eleventh chapter of this book.<sup>341</sup> But, when it is a question of imaginary visions, or other supernatural apprehensions, which can enter the senses without the co-operation of man's free will, I say that at no time and season must it receive them, whether the soul be in the state of perfection, or whether in a state less perfect -- not even though they come from God. And this for two reasons. The first is that, as we have said, He produces His effect in the soul, without its being able to hinder it, although, as often happens, it can and may hinder visions; and consequently that effect which was to be produced in the soul is communicated to it much more substantially, although not after that manner. For, as we said likewise, the soul cannot hinder the blessings that God desires to communicate to it, since it is not in the soul's power to do so, save when it has some imperfection and attachment; and there is neither imperfection nor attachment in renouncing these things with humility and misgiving. The second reason is that the soul may free itself from the peril and effort inherent in discerning between evil visions and good, and in deciding whether an angel be of light or of darkness. This effort brings the soul no advantage; it merely wastes its time, and hinders it, and becomes to it an occasion of many imperfections and of failure to make progress. The soul concerns not itself, in such a case, with what is important, nor frees itself of trifles in the shape of apprehensions and perceptions of some particular kind. This has already been said in the discussion of corporeal visions; and more will be said on the subject hereafter.

8. Let it be believed, too, that, if Our Lord were not about to lead the soul in a way befitting its own nature, as we say here, He would never communicate to it the abundance of His Spirit through these aqueducts, which are so narrow -- these forms and figures and particular perceptions -- by means whereof He gives the soul enlightenment by crumbs. For this cause David says: *Mittit crystallum suam sicut*

---

<sup>339</sup>1 Corinthians xiii, 11.

<sup>340</sup>[*Lit.*, 'I emptied.']

<sup>341</sup>In reality, this instruction is given in Chap. xiii.

*buccellas*.<sup>342</sup> Which is as much as to say: He sent His wisdom to the souls as in morsels. It is greatly to be lamented that, though the soul has infinite capacity, it should be given its food by morsels conveyed through the senses, by reason of the small degree of its spirituality and its incapacitation by sense. Saint Paul was also grieved by this lack of preparation and this incapability of men for receiving the Spirit, when he wrote to the Corinthians, saying: 'I, brethren, when I came to you, could not speak to you as to spiritual persons, but as to carnal; for ye could not receive it, neither can ye now.' *Tamquam parvulis in Christo lac potum vobis dedi, non escam*.<sup>343</sup> That is: I have given you milk to drink, as to infants in Christ, and not solid food to eat.

9. It now remains, then, to be pointed out that the soul must not allow its eyes to rest upon that outer husk -- namely, figures and objects set before it supernaturally. These may be presented to the exterior senses, as are locutions and words audible to the ear; or, to the eyes, visions of saints, and of beauteous radiance; or perfumes to the sense of smell; or tastes and sweetnesses to the palate; or other delights to the touch, which are wont to proceed from the spirit, a thing that very commonly happens to spiritual persons. Or the soul may have to avert its eyes from visions of interior sense, such as imaginary visions, all of which it must renounce entirely. It must set its eyes only upon the spiritual good which they produce, striving to preserve it in its works and to practise that which is for the due service of God, paying no heed to those representations nor desiring any pleasure of sense. And in this way the soul takes from these things only that which God intends and wills -- namely, the spirit of devotion -- for there is no other important purpose for which He gives them; and it casts aside that which He would not give if these gifts could be received in the spirit without it, as we have said -- namely, the exercise and apprehension of the senses.

## CHAPTER XVIII

*Which treats of the harm that certain spiritual masters may do to souls when they direct them not by a good method with respect to the visions aforementioned. Describes also how these visions may cause deception even though they be of God.*

IN this matter of visions we cannot be as brief as we should desire, since there is so much to say about them. Although in substance we have said what is relevant in order to explain to the spiritual person how he is to behave with regard to the visions aforementioned, and to the master who directs him, the way in which he is to deal with his disciple, yet it will not be superfluous to go into somewhat greater detail about this doctrine, and to give more enlightenment as to the harm which can ensue, either to spiritual souls or to the masters who direct them, if they are over-credulous about them, although they be of God.

2. The reason which has now moved me to write at length about this is the lack of discretion, as I understand it, which I have observed in certain spiritual masters. Trusting to these supernatural apprehensions, and believing that they are good and come from God, both masters and disciples have fallen into great error and found themselves in dire straits, wherein is fulfilled the saying of Our Saviour: *Si coecus coeco*

---

<sup>342</sup>Psalm cxlvii, 17.

<sup>343</sup>1 Corinthians iii, 1-2.

*ducatum praestet, ambo in foveam cadunt.*<sup>344</sup> Which signifies: If a blind man lead another blind man, both fall into the pit. And He says not 'shall fall,' but 'fall.' For they may fall without falling into error, since the very venturing of the one to guide the other is going astray, and thus they fall in this respect alone, at the very least. And, first of all, there are some whose way and method with souls that experience these visions cause them to stray, or embarrass them with respect to their visions, or guide them not along the road in some way (for which reason they remain without the true spirit of faith) and edify them not in faith, but lead them to speak highly of those things. By doing this they make them realize that they themselves set some value upon them, or make great account of them, and, consequently, their disciples do the same. Thus their souls have been set upon these apprehensions, instead of being edified in faith, so that they may be empty and detached, and freed from those things and can soar to the heights of dark faith. All this arises from the terms and language which the soul observes its master to employ with respect to these apprehensions; somehow it very easily develops a satisfaction and an esteem for them, which is not in its own control, and which averts its eyes from the abyss of faith.

3. And the reason why this is so easy must be that the soul is so greatly occupied with these things of sense that, as it is inclined to them by nature, and is likewise disposed to enjoy the apprehension of distinct and sensible things, it has only to observe in its confessor, or in some other person, a certain esteem and appreciation for them, and not merely will it at once conceive the same itself, but also, without its realizing the fact, its desire will become lured away by them, so that it will feed upon them and will be ever more inclined toward them and will set a certain value upon them. And hence arise many imperfections, at the very least; for the soul is no longer as humble as before, but thinks that all this is of some importance and productive of good, and that it is itself esteemed by God, and that He is pleased and somewhat satisfied with it, which is contrary to humility. And thereupon the devil secretly sets about increasing this, without the soul's realizing it, and begins to suggest ideas to it about others, as to whether they have these things or have them not, or are this or are that; which is contrary to holy simplicity and spiritual solitude.

4. There is much more to be said about these evils, and of how such souls, unless they withdraw themselves, grow not in faith, and also of how there are other evils of the same kind which, although they be not so palpable and recognizable as these, are subtler and more hateful in the Divine eyes, and which result from not living in complete detachment. Let us, however, leave this subject now, until we come to treat of the vice of spiritual gluttony and of the other six vices, whereof, with the help of God, many things will be said, concerning these subtle and delicate stains which adhere to the spirit when its director cannot guide it in detachment.

5. Let us now say something of this manner wherein certain confessors deal with souls, and instruct them ill. And of a truth I could wish that I knew how to describe it, for I realize that it is a difficult thing to explain how the spirit of the disciple grows in conformity with that of his spiritual father, in a hidden and secret way; and this matter is so tedious that it wearies me, for it seems impossible to speak of the one thing without describing the other also, as they are spiritual things, and the one corresponds with the other.

6. But it is sufficient to say here that I believe, if the spiritual father has an

---

<sup>344</sup>St. Matthew xv, 14.

inclination toward revelations of such a kind that they mean something to him, or satisfy or delight his soul, it is impossible but that he will impress that delight and that aim upon the spirit of his disciple, even without realizing it, unless the disciple be more advanced than he; and, even in this latter case, he may well do him grievous harm if he continue with him. For, from that inclination of the spiritual father toward such visions, and the pleasure which he takes in them, there arises a certain kind of esteem for them, of which, unless he watch it carefully, he cannot fail to communicate some indication or impression to other persons; and if any other such person is like-minded and has a similar inclination, it is impossible, as I understand, but that there will be communicated from the one to the other a readiness to apprehend these things and a great esteem for them.

7. But we need not now go into detail about this. Let us speak of the confessor who, whether or no he be inclined toward these things, has not the prudence that he ought to have in disencumbering the soul of his disciple and detaching his desire from them, but begins to speak to him about these visions and devotes the greater part of his spiritual conversation to them, as we have said, giving him signs by which he may distinguish good visions from evil. Now, although it is well to know this, there is no reason for him to involve the soul in such labour, anxiety and peril. By paying no heed to visions, and refusing to receive them, all this is prevented, and the soul acts as it should. Nor is this all, for such confessors, when they see that their penitents are receiving visions from God, beg them to entreat God to reveal them to themselves also, or to say such and such things to them, with respect to themselves or to others, and the foolish souls do so, thinking that it is lawful to desire knowledge by this means. For they suppose that, because God is pleased to reveal or say something by supernatural means, in His own way or for His own purpose, it is lawful for them to desire Him to reveal it to them, and even to entreat Him to do so.

8. And, if it come to pass that God answers their petition and reveals it, they become more confident, thinking that, because God answers them, it is His will and pleasure to do so; whereas, in reality, it is neither God's will nor His pleasure. And they frequently act or believe according to that which He has revealed to them, or according to the way wherein He has answered them; for, as they are attached to that manner of communion with God, the revelation makes a great impression upon them and their will acquiesces in it. They take a natural pleasure in their own way of thinking and therefore naturally acquiesce in it; and frequently they go astray. Then they see that something happens in a way they had not expected; and they marvel, and then begin to doubt if the thing were of God,<sup>345</sup> since it happens not, and they see it not, according to their expectations. At the beginning they thought two things: first, that the vision was of God, since at the beginning it agreed so well with their disposition, and their natural inclination to that kind of thing may well have been the cause of this agreement, as we have said; and secondly that, being of God, it would turn out as they thought or expected.

9. And herein lies a great delusion, for revelations or locutions which are of God do not always turn out as men expect or as they imagine inwardly. And thus they must never be believed or trusted blindly, even though they are known to be revelations or answers or sayings of God. For, although they may in themselves be certain and true, they are not always so in their causes, and according to our manner of understanding,

---

<sup>345</sup>[*Lit.*, 'if it were of God.']

as we shall prove in the chapter following. And afterwards we shall further say and prove that, although God sometimes gives a supernatural answer to that which is asked of Him, it is not His pleasure to do so, and sometimes, although He answers, He is angered.

## CHAPTER XIX

*Wherein is expounded and proved how, although visions and locutions which come from God are true, we may be deceived about them. This is proved by quotations from Divine Scripture.*

FOR two reasons we have said that, although visions and locutions which come from God are true, and in themselves are always certain, they are not always so with respect to ourselves. One reason is the defective way in which we understand them; and the other, the variety of their causes. In the first place, it is clear that they are not always as they seem, nor do they turn out as they appear to our manner of thinking. The reason for this is that, since God is vast and boundless, He is wont, in His prophecies, locutions and revelations, to employ ways, concepts and methods of seeing things which differ greatly from such purpose and method as can normally be understood by ourselves; and these are the truer and the more certain the less they seem so to us. This we constantly see in the Scriptures. To many of the ancients many prophecies and locutions of God came not to pass as they expected, because they understood them after their own manner, in the wrong way, and quite literally. This will be clearly seen in these passages.

2. In Genesis, God said to Abraham, when He had brought him to the land of the Chanaanites: *Tibi dabo terram hanc*.<sup>346</sup> Which signifies, I will give thee this land. And when He had said it to him many times, and Abraham was by now very *Domine, unde scire possum, quod possessurus sim eam?* That old, and He had never given it to him, though He had said this to him, Abraham answered God once again and said: Lord, whereby or by what sign am I to know that I am to possess it? Then God revealed to him that he was not to possess it in person, but that his sons would do so after four hundred years; and Abraham then understood the promise, which in itself was most true; for, in giving it to his sons for love of him, God was giving it to himself. And thus Abraham was deceived by the way in which he himself had understood the prophecy. If he had then acted according to his own understanding of it, those that saw him die without its having been given to him might have erred greatly; for they were not to see the time of its fulfilment. And, as they had heard him say that God would give it to him, they would have been confounded and would have believed it to have been false.

3. Likewise to his grandson Jacob, when Joseph his son brought him to Egypt because of the famine in Chanaan, and when he was on the road, God appeared and said: *Jacob, Jacob, noli timere, descende in Aegyptum, quia in gentem magnam faciam te ibi. Ego descendam tecum illuc. . . . Et inde adducam te revertentem*.<sup>347</sup> Which signifies: Jacob, fear not; go down into Egypt, and I will go down there with thee; and, when thou goest forth thence again, I will bring thee out and guide thee. This promise,

---

<sup>346</sup>Genesis xv, 7.

<sup>347</sup>Genesis xlv, 3-4.

as it would seem according to our own manner of understanding, was not fulfilled, for, as we know, the good old man Jacob died in Egypt and never left it alive. The word of God was to be fulfilled in his children, whom He brought out thence after many years, being Himself their guide upon the way. It is clear that anyone who had known of this promise made by God to Jacob would have considered it certain that Jacob, even as he had gone to Egypt alive, in his own person, by the command and favour of God, would of a certainty leave it, alive and in his own person, in the same form and manner as he went there, since God had promised him a favourable return; and such a one would have been deceived, and would have marvelled greatly, when he saw him die in Egypt, and the promise, in the sense in which he understood it, remain unfulfilled. And thus, while the words of God are in themselves most true, it is possible to be greatly mistaken with regard to them.

4. In the Judges, again, we read that, when all the tribes of Israel had come together to make war against the tribe of Benjamin, in order to punish a certain evil to which that tribe had been consenting, they were so certain of victory because God had appointed them a captain for the war, that, when twenty-two thousand of their men were conquered and slain, they marvelled very greatly; and, going into the presence of God, they wept all that day, knowing not the cause of the fall, since they had understood that the victory was to be theirs. And, when they enquired of God if they should give battle again or no, He answered that they should go and fight against them. This time they considered victory to be theirs already, and went out with great boldness, and were conquered again the second time, with the loss of eighteen thousand of their men. Thereat they were greatly confused, and knew not what to do, seeing that God had commanded them to fight and yet each time they were vanquished, though they were superior to their enemies in number and strength, for the men of Benjamin were no more than twenty-five thousand and seven hundred and they were four hundred thousand. And in this way they were mistaken in their manner of understanding the words of God. His words were not deceptive, for He had not told them that they would conquer, but that they should fight; for by these defeats God wished to chastise a certain neglect and presumption of theirs, and thus to humble them. But, when in the end He answered that they would conquer, it was so, although they conquered only after the greatest stratagem and toil.<sup>348</sup>

5. In this way, and in many other ways, souls are oftentimes deceived with respect to locutions and revelations that come from God, because they interpret them according to their apparent sense<sup>349</sup> and literally; whereas, as has already been explained, the principal intention of God in giving these things is to express and convey the spirit that is contained in them, which is difficult to understand. And the spirit is much more pregnant in meaning than the letter, and is very extraordinary, and goes far beyond its limits. And thus, he that clings to the letter, or to a locution or to the form or figure of a vision, which can be apprehended, will not fail to go far astray, and will forthwith fall into great confusion and error, because he has guided himself by sense according to these visions, and not allowed the spirit to work in detachment from sense. *Littera enim occidit, spiritus autem vivificat*,<sup>350</sup> as Saint Paul says. That is: The letter killeth and the spirit giveth life. Wherefore in this matter of sense the letter must be set

---

<sup>348</sup>Judges xx, 12 ff.

<sup>349</sup>[*Lit.*, 'according to the rind.' Cf. bk. II ch. viii, above.]

<sup>350</sup>2 Corinthians iii, 6.

aside, and the soul must remain in darkness, in faith, which is the spirit, and this cannot be comprehended by sense.

6. For which cause, many of the children of Israel, because they took the sayings and prophecies of the prophets according to the strict letter, and these were not fulfilled as they expected, came to make little account of them and believed them not; so much so, that there grew up a common saying among them -- almost a proverb, indeed -- which turned prophets into ridicule. Of this Isaias complains, speaking and exclaiming in the manner following: *Quem docebit Dominus scientiam? et quem intelligere faciet auditum? ablactatos a lacte, avulsos ab uberibus. Quia manda remanda, manda remanda, expecta reexpecta, expecta reexpecta, modicum ibi, modicum ibi. In loquela enim labii, et lingua altera loquetur ad populum istum.*<sup>351</sup> This signifies: To whom shall God teach knowledge? And whom shall He make to understand His word and prophecy? Only them that are already weaned from the milk and drawn away from the breasts. For all say (that is, concerning the prophecies): Promise and promise again; wait and wait again; wait and wait again;<sup>352</sup> a little there, a little there; for in the words of His lips and in another tongue will He speak to this people. Here Isaias shows quite clearly that these people were turning prophecies into ridicule, and that it was in mockery that they repeated this proverb: 'Wait and then wait again.' They meant that the prophecies were never fulfilled for them, for they were wedded to the letter, which is the milk of infants, and to their own sense, which is the breasts, both of which contradict the greatness of spiritual knowledge. Wherefore he says: To whom shall He teach the wisdom of His prophecies? And whom shall He make to understand His doctrine, save them that are already weaned from the milk of the letter and from the breasts of their own senses? For this reason these people understand it not, save according to this milk of the husk and letter, and these breasts of their own sense, since they say: Promise and promise again; wait and wait again, etc. For it is in the doctrine of the mouth of God, and not in their own doctrine, and it is in another tongue than their own, that God shall speak to them.

7. And thus, in interpreting prophecy, we have not to consider our own sense and language, knowing that the language of God is very different from ours, and that it is spiritual language, very far removed from our understanding and exceedingly difficult. So much so is it that even Jeremias, though a prophet of God, when he sees that the significance of the words of God is so different from the sense commonly attributed to them by men, is himself deceived by them and defends the people, saying: *Heu, heu, heu, Domine Deus, ergone decipisti populum istum et Jerusalem, dicens: Pax erit vobis; et ecce pervenit gladius usque ad animam?*<sup>353</sup> Which signifies: Ah, ah, ah, Lord God, hast Thou perchance deceived this people and Jerusalem, saying, 'Peace will come upon you,' and seest Thou here that the sword reacheth unto their soul? For the peace that God promised them was that which was to be made between God and man by means of the Messiah Whom He was to send them, whereas they understood it of temporal peace; and therefore, when they suffered wars and trials, they thought that God was deceiving them, because there befell them the contrary of that which they expected. And thus they said, as Jeremias says likewise: *Exspectavimus pacem, et non*

---

<sup>351</sup>Isaias xxviii, 9-11.

<sup>352</sup> [For 'wait,' we may also read 'hope,' the Spanish word (*esperar*) here used expressing both these ideas.]

<sup>353</sup>Jeremias iv, 10.

*erat bonum.*<sup>354</sup> That is: We have looked for peace and there is no boon of peace. And thus it was impossible for them not to be deceived, since they took the prophecy merely in its literal sense. For who would fail to fall into confusion and to go astray if he confined himself to a literal interpretation of that prophecy which David spake concerning Christ, in the seventy-first Psalm, and of all that he says therein, where he says: *Et dominabitur a mari usque ad mare; et a flumine usque ad terminos orbis terrarum.*<sup>355</sup> That is: He shall have dominion from one sea even to the other sea, and from the river even unto the ends of the earth. And likewise in that which he says in the same place: *Liberabit pauperem a potente, et pauperem, cui non erat adiutor.*<sup>356</sup> Which signifies: He shall deliver the poor man from the power of the mighty, and the poor man that had no helper. But later it became known that Christ was born<sup>357</sup> in a low state and lived in poverty and died in misery; not only had He no dominion over the earth, in a temporal sense, while He lived, but He was subject to lowly people, until He died under the power of Pontius Pilate. And not only did He not deliver poor men -- namely, His disciples -- from the hands of the mighty, in a temporal sense, but He allowed them to be slain and persecuted for His name's sake.

8. The fact is that these prophecies concerning Christ had to be understood spiritually, in which sense they were entirely true. For Christ was not only Lord of earth alone, but likewise of Heaven, since He was God; and the poor who were to follow Him He was not only to redeem and free from the power of the devil, that mighty one against whom they had no helper, but also to make heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven. And thus God was speaking, in the most important sense, of Christ, and of the reward of His followers,<sup>358</sup> which was an eternal kingdom and eternal liberty; and they understood this, after their own manner, in a secondary sense, of which God takes small account, namely that of temporal dominion and temporal liberty, which in God's eyes is neither kingdom nor liberty at all. Wherefore, being blinded by the insufficiency of the letter, and not understanding its spirit and truth, they took the life of their God and Lord, even as Saint Paul said in these words: *Qui enim habitabant Jerusalem, et principes ejus, hunc ignorantes et voces prophetarum, quae per omne Sabbatum leguntur, judicantes impleverunt.*<sup>359</sup> Which signifies: They that dwelt in Jerusalem, and her rulers, not knowing Who He was, nor understanding the sayings of the prophets, which are read every Sabbath day, have fulfilled them by judging Him.

9. And to such a point did they carry this inability to understand the sayings of God as it behoved them, that even His own disciples, who had gone about with Him, were deceived, as were those two who, after His death, were going to the village of Emmaus, sad and disconsolate, saying: *Nos autem sperabamus quod ipse esset redempturus Israel.*<sup>360</sup> We hoped that it was He that should have redeemed Israel. They, too, understood that this dominion and redemption were to be temporal; but Christ our Redeemer, appearing to them, reproved them as foolish and heavy and gross

---

<sup>354</sup>Jeremias viii, 15.

<sup>355</sup>Psalm lxxi, 8 [A.V., lxxii, 8].

<sup>356</sup>Psalm lxxi, 12 [A.V., lxxii, 12.]

<sup>357</sup>[*Lit.*, 'seeing Him later to be born.']

<sup>358</sup>[*Lit.*, 'of Christ and of His followers.' The addition is necessary to the sense.]

<sup>359</sup>Acts xiii, 27.

<sup>360</sup>St. Luke xxiv, 21.



of heart as to their belief in the things that the prophets had spoken.<sup>361</sup> And, even when He was going to Heaven, some of them were still in that state of grossness of heart, and asked Him, saying: *Domine, si in tempore hoc restitues Regnum Israel*.<sup>362</sup> That is: Lord, tell us if Thou wilt restore at this time the kingdom of Israel. The Holy Spirit causes many things to be said which bear another sense than that which men understand; as can be seen in that which he caused to be said by Caiphas concerning Christ: that is was meet that one man should die lest all the people should perish.<sup>363</sup> This he said not of his own accord; and he said it and understood it in one sense, and the Holy Spirit in another.

10. From this it is clear that, although sayings and revelations may be of God, we cannot always be sure of their meaning; for we can very easily be greatly deceived by them because of our manner of understanding them. For they are all an abyss and a depth of the spirit, and to try to limit them to what we can understand concerning them, and to what our sense can apprehend, is nothing but to attempt to grasp the air, and to grasp some particle in it that the hand touches: the air disappears and nothing remains.

11. The spiritual teacher must therefore strive that the spirituality of his disciple be not cramped by attempts to interpret all supernatural apprehensions, which are no more than spiritual particles, lest he come to retain naught but these, and have no spirituality at all. But let the teacher wean his disciple from all visions and locutions, and impress upon him the necessity of dwelling in the liberty and darkness of faith, wherein are received spiritual liberty and abundance, and consequently the wisdom and understanding necessary to interpret sayings of God. For it is impossible for a man, if he be not spiritual, to judge of the things of God or understand them in a reasonable way, and he is not spiritual when he judges them according to sense; and thus, although they come to him beneath the disguise of sense, he understands them not. This Saint Paul well expresses in these words: *Animalis autem homo non percipit ea quoe sunt spiritus Dei: stultitia enim est illi, et non potest intelligere: quia de spiritualibus examinatur. Spiritualis autem judicat omnia*.<sup>364</sup> Which signifies: The animal man perceives not the things which are of the Spirit of God, for unto him they are foolishness and he cannot understand them because they are spiritual; but he that is spiritual judges all things. By the animal man is here meant one that uses sense alone; by the spiritual man, one that is not bound or guided by sense. Wherefore it is temerity to presume to have intercourse with God by way of a supernatural apprehension effected by sense, or to allow anyone else to do so.

12. And that this may be the better understood let us here set down a few examples. Let us suppose that a holy man is greatly afflicted because his enemies persecute him, and that God answers him, saying: I will deliver thee from all thine enemies. This prophecy may be very true, yet, notwithstanding, his enemies may succeed in prevailing, and he may die at their hands. And so if a man should understand this after a temporal manner he would be deceived; for God might be speaking of the true and principal liberty and victory, which is salvation, whereby the soul is delivered, free and made victorious<sup>365</sup> over all its enemies, and much more truly

---

<sup>361</sup>St. Luke xxiv, 25.

<sup>362</sup>Acts i, 6.

<sup>363</sup>St. John xi, 50.

<sup>364</sup>1 Corinthians ii, 14.

<sup>365</sup>[*Lit.*, 'free and victorious.']

so and in a higher sense than if it were delivered from them here below. And thus, this prophecy was much more true and comprehensive than the man could understand if he interpreted it only with respect to this life; for, when God speaks, His words are always to be taken in the sense which is most important and profitable, whereas man, according to his own way and purpose, may understand the less important sense, and thus may be deceived. This we see in that prophecy which David makes concerning Christ in the second Psalm saying: *Reges eos in virga ferrea, et tamquam vas figuli confringes eos.*<sup>366</sup> That is: Thou shalt rule all the people with a rod of iron and thou shalt dash them in pieces like a vessel of clay. Herein God speaks of the principal and perfect dominion, which is eternal dominion; and it was in this sense that it was fulfilled, and not in the less important sense, which was temporal, and which was not fulfilled in Christ during any part of His temporal life.

13. Let us take another example. A soul has great desires to be a martyr. It may happen that God answers him, saying: Thou shalt be a martyr. This will give him inwardly great comfort and confidence that he is to be martyred; yet it may come to pass that he dies not the death of a martyr, and notwithstanding this the promise may be true. Why, then, is it not fulfilled literally? Because it will be fulfilled, and is capable of being fulfilled, according to the most important and essential sense of that saying -- namely, in that God will have given that soul the love and the reward which belong essentially to a martyr; and thus in truth He gives to the soul that which it formally desired and that which He promised it. For the formal desire of the soul was, not that particular manner of death, but to do God a martyr's service, and to show its love for Him as a martyr does. For that manner of death is of no worth in itself without this love, the which love and the showing forth thereof and the reward belonging to the martyr may be given to it more perfectly by other means. So that, though it may not die like a martyr, the soul is well satisfied that it has been given that which it sired. For, when they are born of living love, such desires, and others like them, although they be not fulfilled in the way wherein they are described and understood, are fulfilled in another and a better way, and in a way which honours God more greatly than that which they might have asked. Wherefore David says: *Desiderium pauperum exaudivit Dominus.*<sup>367</sup> That is: The Lord has granted the poor their desire. And in the Proverbs Divine Wisdom says: *Desiderium suum iustis dabitur.*<sup>368</sup> 'The just shall be given their desire.' Hence, then, since we see that many holy men have desired many particular things for God's sake, and that in this life their desires have not been granted them, it is a matter of faith that, as their desires were just and true, they have been fulfilled for them perfectly in the next life. Since this is truth, it would also be truth for God to promise it to them in this life, saying to them: Your desire shall be fulfilled; and for it not to be fulfilled in the way which they expected.

14. In this and other ways, the words and visions of God may be true and sure and yet we may be deceived by them, through being unable to interpret them in a high and important sense, which is the sense and purpose wherein God intends them. And thus the best and surest course is to train souls in prudence so that they flee from these supernatural things, by accustoming them, as we have said, to purity of spirit in dark faith, which is the means of union.

---

<sup>366</sup>Psalm ii, 9.

<sup>367</sup>Psalm ix, 17 [A.V., x, 18].

<sup>368</sup>Proverbs x, 24.

## CHAPTER XX

*Wherein is proved by passages from Scripture how the sayings and words of God, though always true, do not always rest upon stable causes.*

WE have now to prove the second reason why visions and words which come from God, although in themselves they are always true, are not always stable in their relation to ourselves. This is because of their causes, whereon they are founded; for God often makes statements founded upon creatures and their effects, which are changeable and liable to fail, for which reason the statements which are founded upon them are liable also to be changeable and to fail; for, when one thing depends on another, if one fails, the other fails likewise. It is as though God should say: In a year's time I shall send upon this kingdom such or such a plague; and the cause and foundation for this warning is a certain offence which has been committed against God in that kingdom. If the offence should cease or change, the punishment might cease; yet the threat was true because it was founded upon the fault committed at the time, and, if this had continued, it would have been carried out.

2. This, we see, happened in the city of Ninive, where God said: *Adhuc quadraginta dies, et Ninive subvertetur.*<sup>369</sup> Which signifies: Yet forty days and Ninive shall be destroyed. This was not fulfilled, because the cause of the threat ceased -- namely, the sins of the city, for which it did penance -- but, if this had not been so, the prophecy would have been carried into effect. We read likewise in the Third Book of the Kings that, when King Achab had committed a very great sin, God sent to prophesy<sup>370</sup> a great punishment -- our father Elias being the messenger -- which should come upon his person, upon his house and upon his kingdom.<sup>371</sup> And, because Achab rent his garments with grief and clothed himself in haircloth and fasted, and slept in sackcloth and went about in a humble and contrite manner, God sent again, by the same prophet, to declare to him these words: *Quia igitur humiliatus est mei causa, non inducam malum in diebus ejus, sed in diebus filii sui.*<sup>372</sup> Which signifies: Inasmuch as Achab has humbled himself for love of Me, I will not send the evil whereof I spake in his days, but in the days of his son. Here we see that, because Achab changed his spirit and his former affection, God likewise changed His sentence.

3. From this we may deduce, as regards the matter under discussion, that, although God may have revealed or affirmed something to a soul, whether good or evil, and whether relating to that soul itself or to others, this may, to a greater or a lesser extent, be changed or altered or entirely withdrawn, according to the change or variation in the affection of this soul, or the cause whereon God based His judgment, and thus it would not be fulfilled in the way expected, and oftentimes none would have known why, save only God. For God is wont to declare and teach and promise many things, not that they may be understood or possessed at the time, but that they may be understood at a later time, when it is fitting that a soul may have light concerning them, or when their

---

<sup>369</sup>Jonas iii, 4.

<sup>370</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to promise.']

<sup>371</sup>3 Kings [A.V., 1 Kings] xxi, 21.

<sup>372</sup>3 Kings [A.V., 1 Kings] xxi, 27-9.

effect is attained. This, as we see, He did with His disciples, to whom He spake many parables, and pronounced many judgments, the wisdom whereof they understood not until the time when they had to preach it, which was when the Holy Spirit came upon them, of Whom Christ had said to them that He would explain to them all the things that He had spoken to them in His life. And, when Saint John speaks of that entry of Christ into Jerusalem, he says: *Haec non cognoverunt discipuli ejus primum: sed quando glorificatus est Jesus, tunc recordati sunt quia haec erant scripta de eo.*<sup>373</sup> And thus there may pass through the soul many detailed messages from God which neither the soul nor its director will understand until the proper time.

4. Likewise, in the First Book of the Kings, we read that, when God was wroth against Heli, a priest of Israel, for his sins in not chastising his sons, he sent to him by Samuel to say, among other words, these which follow: *Loquens locutus sum, ut domus tua, et domus patris tui, ministraret in conspectu meo, usque in sempiternum. Verumtamen absit hoc a me.* And this is as though He had said:<sup>374</sup> In very truth I said aforetime that thy house and the house of thy father should serve Me continually in the priesthood in my presence for ever, but this purpose is far from Me; I will not do this thing. For this office of the priesthood was founded for giving honour and glory to God, and to this end God has promised to give it to the father of Heli for ever if he failed not. But, when Heli failed in zeal for the honour of God (for, as God Himself complained when He sent him the message, he honoured his sons more than God, overlooking their sins so as not to offend them), the promise also failed which would have held good for ever if the good service and zeal of Heli had lasted for ever. And thus there is no reason to think that, because sayings and revelations come from God, they must invariably come to pass in their apparent sense, especially when they are bound up with human causes which may vary, change, or alter.

5. And when they are dependent upon these causes God Himself knows, though He does not always declare it, but pronounces the saying, or makes the revelation, and sometimes says nothing of the condition, as when He definitely told the Ninivites that they would be destroyed after forty days.<sup>375</sup> At other times, he lays down the condition, as He did to Roboam, saying to him: 'If thou wilt keep My commandments, as my servant David, I will be with thee even as I was with him, and will set thee up a house as I did to My servant David'.<sup>376</sup> But, whether He declares it or no, the soul must not rely upon its own understanding; for it is impossible to understand the hidden truths of God which are in His sayings, and the multitude of their meanings. He is above the heavens, and speaks according to the way of eternity;<sup>377</sup> we blind souls are upon the earth and understand only the ways of flesh and time. It was for that reason, I believe, that the Wise Man said: 'God is in Heaven, and thou are upon earth; wherefore be not thou lengthy or hasty in speaking.'<sup>378</sup>

6. You will perhaps ask me: Why, if we are not to understand these things, or to play any part in them, does God communicate them to us? I have already said that everything will be understood in its own time by the command of Him Who spake it, and

---

<sup>373</sup>St. John xii, 16.

<sup>374</sup>1 Kings [A.V., 1 Samuel] ii, 30.

<sup>375</sup>Jonas iii, 4.

<sup>376</sup>3 Kings [A.V., 1 Kings] xi, 38. [Actually it was to Jeroboam that this was said.]

<sup>377</sup>[*Lit.*, 'on the road of eternity.']

<sup>378</sup>Ecclesiastes v, 1 [A.V. v, 2].

he whom God wills shall understand it, and it will be seen that it was fitting; for God does naught save with due cause and in truth. Let it be realized, therefore, that there is no complete understanding of the meaning of the sayings and things of God, and that this meaning cannot be decided by what it seems to be, without great error, and, in the end, grievous confusion. This was very well known to the prophets, into whose hands was given the word of God, and who found it a sore trial to prophesy concerning the people; for, as we have said, many of the people saw that things came not to pass literally, as they were told them, for which cause they laughed at the prophets and mocked them greatly; so much that Jeremias went as far as to say: 'They mock me all the day long, they scorn and despise me every one, for I have long been crying against evil and promising them destruction; and the word of the Lord has been made a reproach and a derision to me continually. And I said, I must not remember Him, neither speak any more in His name.'<sup>379</sup> Herein, although the holy prophet was speaking with resignation and in the form of a weak man who cannot endure the ways and workings of God, he clearly indicates the difference between the way wherein the Divine sayings are fulfilled and the ordinary meaning which they appear to have; for the Divine prophets were treated as mockers, and suffered so much from their prophecy that Jeremias himself said elsewhere: *Formido et laqueus facta est nobis vaticinatio et contritio*.<sup>380</sup> Which signifies: Prophecy has become to us fear and snares and contradiction of spirit.

7. And the reason why Jonas fled when God sent him to preach the destruction of Ninive was this, namely, that he knew the different meanings of the sayings of God with respect to the understanding of men and with respect to the causes of the sayings. And thus, lest they should mock him when they saw that his prophecy was not fulfilled, he went away and lied in order not to prophesy; and thus he remained waiting all the forty days outside the city, to see if his prophecy was fulfilled; and, when it was not fulfilled, he was greatly afflicted, so much so that he said to God: *Obsecro, Domine, numquid non hoc est verbum meum, cum adhuc essem in terra mea? propter hoc praeoccupavi, ut fugerem in Tharsis*.<sup>381</sup> That is: I pray Thee, O Lord, is not this what I said when I was yet in my own country? Therefore was I vexed, and fled away to Tharsis. And the saint was wroth and besought God to take away his life.

8. Why, then, must we marvel that God should speak and reveal certain things to souls which come not to pass in the sense wherein they understand them? For, if God should affirm or represent such or such a thing to the soul, whether good or evil, with respect to itself or to another, and if that thing be founded upon a certain affection or service or offence of that soul, or of another, at that time, with respect to God, so that, if the soul persevere therein, it will be fulfilled; yet even then its fulfillment is not certain, since it is not certain that the soul will persevere. Wherefore we must rely, not upon understanding, but upon faith.

## CHAPTER XXI

*Wherein is explained how at times, although God answers the prayers that are addressed to Him, He is not pleased that we should use such methods. It is also shown*

---

<sup>379</sup>Jeremias xx, 7-9.

<sup>380</sup>Lamentations iii, 47.

<sup>381</sup>Jonas iv, 2.

*how, although He condescend to us and answer us, He is oftentimes wroth.*

CERTAIN spiritual men, as we have said, assure themselves that it is a good thing to display curiosity, as they sometimes do, in striving to know certain things by supernatural methods, thinking that, because God occasionally answers their importunity, this is a good method and pleasing to Him. Yet the truth is that, although He may answer them, the method is not good, neither is it pleasing to God, but rather it is displeasing to Him; and not only so, but oftentimes He is greatly offended and wroth. The reason for this is that it is lawful for no creature to pass beyond the limits that God has ordained for its governance after the order of nature. He has laid down rational and natural limits for man's governance; wherefore to desire to pass beyond them is not lawful, and to desire to seek out and attain to anything by supernatural means is to go beyond these natural limits. It is therefore an unlawful thing, and it is therefore not pleasing to God, for He is offended by all that is unlawful. King Achaz was well aware of this, since, although Isaias told him from God to ask for a sign, he would not do so, saying: *Non petam, et non tentabo Dominum*.<sup>382</sup> That is: I will not ask such a thing, neither will I tempt God. For it is tempting God to seek to commune with Him by extraordinary ways, such as those that are supernatural.

2. But why, you will say, if it be a fact that God is displeased, does He sometimes answer? I reply that it is sometimes the devil who answers. And, if it is God Who answers, I reply that He does so because of the weakness of the soul that desires to travel along that road, lest it should be disconsolate and go backward, or lest it should think that God is wroth with it and should be overmuch afflicted; or for other reasons known to God, founded upon the weakness of that soul, whereby God sees that it is well that He should answer it and deigns to do so in that way. In a like manner, too, does He treat many weak and tender souls, granting them favours and sweetness in sensible converse with Himself, as has been said above; this is not because He desires or is pleased that they should commune with Him after that manner or by these methods; it is that He gives to each one, as we have said, after the manner best suited to him. For God is like a spring, whence everyone draws water according to the vessel which he carries. Sometimes a soul is allowed to draw it by these extraordinary channels; but it follows not from this that it is lawful to draw water by them, but only that God Himself can permit this, when, how and to whom He wills, and for what reason He wills, without the party concerned having any right in the matter. And thus, as we say, He sometimes deigns to satisfy the desire and the prayer of certain souls, whom, since they are good and sincere, He wills not to fail to succour, lest He should make them sad, but it is not because He is pleased with their methods that He wills it. This will be the better understood by the following comparison.

3. The father of a family has on his table many and different kinds of food, some of which are better than others. A child is asking him for a certain dish, not the best, but the first that meets its eye, and it asks for this dish because it would rather eat of it than any other; and as the father sees that, even if he gives it the better kind of food, it will not take it, but will have that which it asks for, since that alone pleases it, he gives it that, regretfully, lest it should take no food at all and be miserable. In just this way, we observe, did God treat the children of Israel when they asked Him for a king: He gave them one, but unwillingly, because it was not good for them. And thus He said to

---

<sup>382</sup>Isaias vii, 12. [The Spanish has 'Achab' for 'Achaz.']

Samuel: *Audi vocem populi in omnibus quae loquuntur tibi: non enim te objecerunt, sed me.*<sup>383</sup> Which signifies: Harken unto the voice of this people and grant them the king whom they ask of thee, for they have not rejected thee but Me, that I should not reign over them. In this same way God condescends to certain souls, and grants them that which is not best for them, because they will not or cannot walk by any other road. And thus certain souls attain to tenderness and sweetness of spirit or sense; and God grants them this because they are unable to partake of the stronger and more solid food of the trials of the Cross of His Son, which He would prefer them to take, rather than aught else.

4. I consider, however, that the desire to know things by supernatural means is much worse than the desire for other spiritual favours pertaining to the senses; for I cannot see how the soul that desires them can fail to commit, at the least, venial sin, however good may be its aims, and however far advanced it may be on the road to perfection; and if anyone should bid the soul desire them, and consent to it, he sins likewise. For there is no necessity for any of these things, since the soul has its natural reason and the doctrine and law of the Gospel, which are quite sufficient for its guidance, and there is no difficulty or necessity that cannot be solved and remedied by these means, which are very pleasing to God and of great profit to souls; and such great use must we make of our reason and of Gospel doctrine that, if certain things be told us supernaturally, whether at our desire or no, we must receive only that which is in clear conformity with reason and Gospel law. And then we must receive it, not because it is revelation, but because it is reason, and not allow ourselves to be influenced by the fact that it has been revealed. Indeed, it is well in such a case to look at that reason and examine it very much more closely than if there had been no revelation concerning it; inasmuch as the devil utters many things that are true, and that will come to pass, and that are in conformity with reason, in order that he may deceive.

5. Wherefore, in all our needs, trials and difficulties, there remains to us no better and surer means than prayer and hope that God will provide for us, by such means as He wills. This is the advice given to us in the Scriptures, where we read that, when King Josaphat was greatly afflicted and surrounded by enemies, the saintly King gave himself to prayer, saying to God: *Cum ignoremus quid facere debeamus, hoc solum habemus residue, ut oculos nostros dirigamus ad re.*<sup>384</sup> Which is as though he had said: When means fail and reason is unable to succour us in our necessities, it remains for us only to lift up our eyes to Thee, that Thou mayest succour us as is most pleasing to Thee.

6. And further, although this has also been made clear, it will be well to prove, from certain passages of Scripture, that, though God may answer such requests, He is none the less sometimes wroth. In the First Book of the Kings it is said that, when King Saul begged that the prophet Samuel, who was now dead, might speak to him, the said prophet appeared to him, and that God was wroth with all this, since Samuel at once reproved Saul for having done such a thing, saying: *Quare inquietasti me, ut suscitarer?*<sup>385</sup> That is: Why hast thou disquieted me, in causing me to arise? We also know that, in spite of having answered the children of Israel and given them the meat that they besought of Him, God was nevertheless greatly incensed against them; for He

---

<sup>383</sup>1 Kings [A.V., 1 Samuel] viii, 7.

<sup>384</sup>2 Paralipomenon [A.V., 2 Chronicles] xx, 12.

<sup>385</sup>1 Kings [A.V., 1 Samuel] xxviii, 15.

sent fire from Heaven upon them as a punishment, as we read in the Pentateuch, and as David relates in these words: *Adhuc escape eorum erant in ore ipsorum, et ira Dei descendit super eos.*<sup>386</sup> Which signifies: Even as they had the morsels in their mouths, the wrath of God came down upon them. And likewise we read in Numbers that God was greatly wroth with Balaam the prophet, because he went to the Madianites when Balac their king sent for him, although God had bidden him go, because he desired to go and had begged it of God; and while he was yet in the way there appeared to him an angel with a sword, who desired to slay him, and said to him: *Perversa est via tua, mihi que contraria.*<sup>387</sup> 'Thy way is perverse and contrary to Me.' For which cause he desired to slay him.

7. After this manner and many others God deigns to satisfy the desires of souls though He be wroth with them. Concerning this we have many testimonies in Scripture, and, in addition, many illustrations, though in a matter that is so clear these are unnecessary. I will merely say that to desire to commune with God by such means is a most perilous thing, more so than I can express, and that one who is affectioned to such methods will not fail to err greatly and will often find himself in confusion. Anyone who in the past has prized them will understand me from his own experience. For over and above the difficulty that there is in being sure that one is not going astray in respect of locutions and visions which are of God, there are ordinarily many of these locutions and visions which are of the devil; for in his converse with the soul the devil habitually wears the same guise as God assumes in His dealings with it, setting before it things that are very like to those which God communicates to it, insinuating himself, like the wolf in sheep's clothing, among the flock, with a success so nearly complete that he can hardly be recognized. For, since he says many things that are true, and in conformity with reason, and things that come to pass as he describes them,<sup>388</sup> it is very easy for the soul to be deceived, and to think that, since these things come to pass as he says, and the future is correctly foretold, this can be the work of none save God; for such souls know not that it is a very easy thing for one that has clear natural light to be acquainted, as to their causes, with things, or with many of them, which have been or shall be. And since the devil has a very clear light of this kind, he can very easily deduce effect from cause, although it may not always turn out as he says, because all causes depend upon the will of God. Let us take an example.

8. The devil knows that the constitution of the earth and the atmosphere, and the laws ruling the sun, are disposed in such manner and in such degree that, when a certain moment has arrived, it will necessarily follow, according to the laws of nature laid down for these elements, that they will infect people with pestilence, and he knows in what places this will be more severe and in what places less so. Here you have a knowledge of pestilence in respect of its causes. What a wonderful thing it seems when the devil reveals this to a soul, saying: 'In a year or in six months from now there will be pestilence,' and it happens as he says! And yet this is a prophecy of the devil. In the same way he may have a knowledge of earthquakes, and, seeing that the bowels of the earth are filling with air, will say: 'At such a time there will be an earthquake.' Yet this is only natural knowledge, for the possession of which it suffices for the spirit to be free from the passions of the soul, even as Boetius says in these words: *Si vis claro lumine*

---

<sup>386</sup>Psalm lxxvii, 30-1 [A.V., lxxviii, 30-1].

<sup>387</sup>Numbers xxii, 32.

<sup>388</sup>[*Lit.*, 'that come out true.']



*cernere verum, gaudia pelle, timorem, spemque fugato, nec dolor adsit.*<sup>389</sup> That is: If thou desire to know truths with the clearness of nature, cast from thee rejoicing and fear and hope and sorrow.

9. And likewise supernatural events and happenings may be known, in their causes, in matters concerning Divine Providence, which deals most justly and surely as is required by their good or evil causes as regards the sons of men. For one may know by natural means that such or such a person, or such or such a city, or some other place, is in such or such necessity, or has reached such or such a point, so that God, according to His providence and justice, must deal with such a person or thing in the way required by its cause, and in the way that is fitting for it, whether by means of punishment or of reward, as the cause merits. And then one can say: 'At such a time God will give you this, or will do this, or that will come to pass, of a surety.' It was this that holy Judith said to Holofernes,<sup>390</sup> when, in order to persuade him that the children of Israel would without fail be destroyed, she first related to him many of their sins and the evil deeds that they did. And then she said: *Et, quoniam haec faciunt, certum est quod in perditionem dabuntur.* Which signifies: Since they do these things, it is certain that they will be destroyed. This is to know the punishment in the cause, and it is as though she had said: It is certain that such sins must be the cause of such punishments, at the hand of God Who is most just. And as the Divine Wisdom says: *Per quae quis peccat, per haec et torquetur.*<sup>391</sup> With respect to that and for that wherein a man sins, therein is he punished.

10. The devil may have knowledge of this, not only naturally, but also by the experience which he has of having seen God do similar things, and he can foretell it and do so correctly. Again, holy Tobias was aware of the punishment of the city of Nineve because of its cause, and he thus admonished his son, saying: 'Behold, son, in the hour when I and thy mother die, go thou forth from this land, for it will not remain.' *Video enim quia iniquitas ejus finem dabit ei.*<sup>392</sup> I see clearly that its own iniquity will be the cause of its punishment, which will be that it shall be ended and destroyed altogether. This might have been known by the devil as well as by Tobias, not only because of the iniquity of the city, but by experience, since they had seen that for the sins of the world God destroyed it in the Flood, and that the Sodomites, too, perished for their sins by fire; but Tobias knew it also through the Divine Spirit.

11. And the devil may know that one Peter<sup>393</sup> cannot, in the course of nature, live more than so many years, and he may foretell this; and so with regard to many other things and in many ways that it is impossible to recount fully -- nor can one even begin to recount many of them, since they are most intricate and subtle -- he insinuates falsehoods; from which a soul cannot free itself save by fleeing from all revelations and visions and locutions that are supernatural. Wherefore God is justly angered with those that receive them, for He sees that it is temerity on their part to expose themselves to such great peril and presumption and curiosity, and things that spring from pride, and

---

<sup>389</sup>The exact reading in Boetius is: 'Tu quoque si vis lumine claro cernere verum -- Tramite recto carpere callem -- Gaudia pelle -- Pelle timorem -- Spemque fugato -- Nec dolor adsit' (Migne, Vol. LXXV, p. 122).

<sup>390</sup>Judith xi, 12.

<sup>391</sup>Wisdom xi, 17 [A.V., xi, 16].

<sup>392</sup>Tobias xiv, 13.

<sup>393</sup>[i.e., any individual.]

are the root and foundation of vainglory, and of disdain for the things of God, and the beginning of many evils to which many have come. Such persons have succeeded in angering God so greatly that He has of set purpose allowed them to go astray and be deceived and to blind their own spirits and to leave the ordered paths of life and give rein to their vanities and fancies, according to the word of Isaias, where he says: *Dominus miscuit in medio ejus spiritum vertiginis*.<sup>394</sup> Which is as much to say: The Lord hath mingled in the midst thereof the spirit of dissension and confusion. Which in our ordinary vernacular signifies the spirit of misunderstanding. What Isaias is here very plainly saying is to our purpose, for he is speaking of those who were endeavouring by supernatural means to know things that were to come to pass. And therefore he says that God mingled in their midst the spirit of misunderstanding; not that God willed them, in fact, to have the spirit of error, or gave it to them, but that they desired to meddle with that to which by nature they could not attain. Angered by this, God allowed them to act foolishly, giving them no light as to that wherewith He desired not that they should concern themselves. And thus the Prophet says that God mingled that spirit in them, privatively. And in this sense God is the cause of such an evil -- that is to say, He is the privative cause, which consists in His withdrawal of His light and favour, to such a point that they must needs fall into error.

12. And in this way God gives leave to the devil to blind and deceive many, when their sins and audacities merit it; and this the devil can do and does successfully, and they give him credence and believe him to be a good spirit; to such a point that, although they may be quite persuaded that he is not so, they cannot undeceive themselves, since, by the permission of God, there has already been insinuated into them the spirit of misunderstanding, even as we read was the case with the prophets of King Achab, whom God permitted to be deceived by a lying spirit, giving the devil leave to deceive them, and saying: *Decipies, et praevaleris; egredere, et fac ita*.<sup>395</sup> Which signifies: Thou shalt prevail with thy falsehood, and shalt deceive them; go forth and do so. And so well was he able to work upon the prophets and the King, in order to deceive them, that they would not believe the prophet Micheas, who prophesied the truth to them, saying the exact contrary of that which the others had prophesied, and this came to pass because God permitted them to be blinded, since their affections were attached to that which they desired to happen to them, and God answered them according to their desires and wishes; and this was a most certain preparation and means for their being blinded and deceived, which God allowed of set purpose.

13. Thus, too, did Ezechiel prophesy in the name of God. Speaking against those who began to desire to have knowledge direct from God, from motives of curiosity, according to the vanity of their spirit, he says: When such a man comes to the prophet to enquire of Me through him, I, the Lord, will answer him by Myself, and I will set my face in anger against that man; and, as to the prophet, when he has gone astray in that which was asked of him, *Ego Dominus decepi prophetam illum*.<sup>396</sup> That is: I, the Lord, have deceived that prophet. This is to be taken to mean, by not succouring him with His favour so that he might not be deceived; and this is His meaning when He says: I the Lord will answer him by Myself in anger<sup>397</sup> -- that is, God will withdraw His grace and

---

<sup>394</sup>Isaias xix, 14.

<sup>395</sup>3 Kings [A.V., 1 Kings] xxii, 22.

<sup>396</sup>Ezechiel xiv, 7-9.

<sup>397</sup>[Ezechiel xiv, 7.]

favour from that man. Hence necessarily follows deception by reason of his abandonment by God. And then comes the devil and makes answer according to the pleasure and desire of that man, who, being pleased thereat, since the answers and communications are according to his will, allows himself to be deceived greatly.

14. It may appear that we have to some extent strayed from the purpose that we set down in the title of this chapter, which was to prove that, although God answers, He sometimes complains. But, if it be carefully considered, all that has been said goes to prove or intention; for it all shows that God desires not that we should wish for such visions, since He makes it possible for us to be deceived by them in so many ways.

## CHAPTER XXII

*Wherein is solved a difficulty -- namely, why it is not lawful, under the law of grace, to ask anything of God by supernatural means, as it was under the old law. This solution is proved by a passage from Saint Paul.*

DIFFICULTIES keep coming to our mind, and thus we cannot progress with the speed that we should desire. For as they occur to us, we are obliged of necessity to clear them up, so that the truth of this teaching may ever be plain and carry its full force. But there is always this advantage in these difficulties, that, although they somewhat impede our progress, they serve nevertheless to make our intention the clearer and more explicit,<sup>398</sup> as will be the case with the present one.

2. In the previous chapter, we said that it is not the will of God that souls should desire to receive anything distinctly, by supernatural means, through visions, locutions, etc. Further, we saw in the same chapter, and deduced from the testimonies which were there brought forward from Scripture, that such communion with God was employed in the Old Law and was lawful; and that not only was it lawful, but God commanded it. And when they used not this opportunity, God reproveth them, as is to be seen in Isaiah, where God reproves the children of Israel because they desired to go down to Egypt without first enquiring of Him, saying: *Et os meum non interrogastis*.<sup>399</sup> That is: Ye asked not first at My own mouth what was fitting. And likewise we read in Josue that, when the children of Israel themselves are deceived by the Gabaonites, the Holy Spirit reproves them for this fault, saying: *Susceperunt ergo de cibariis eorum, et os Domini non interrogaverunt*.<sup>400</sup> Which signifies: They took of their victuals and they enquired not at the mouth of God. Furthermore, we see in the Divine Scripture that Moses always enquired of God, as did King David and all the kings of Israel with regard to their wars and necessities, and the priests and prophets of old, and God answered and spake with them and was not wroth, and it was well done; and if they did it not it would be ill done; and this is the truth. Why, then, in the new law -- the law of grace -- may it not now be as it was aforetime?

3. To this it must be replied that the principal reason why in the law of Scripture the enquiries that were made of God were lawful, and why it was fitting that prophets and priests should seek visions and revelations of God, was because at that time faith

---

<sup>398</sup>[*Lit.*, 'they serve nevertheless for the greater doctrine and clearness of our intention.']

<sup>399</sup>Isaiah xxx, 2.

<sup>400</sup>Josue ix, 14.

had no firm foundation, neither was the law of the Gospel established; and thus it was needful that men should enquire of God and that He should speak, whether by words or by visions and revelations or whether by figures and similitudes or by many other ways of expressing His meaning. For all that He answered and spake and revealed belonged to the mysteries of our faith and things touching it or leading to it. And, since the things of faith are not of man, but come from the mouth of God Himself, God Himself reproved them because they enquired not at His mouth in their affairs, so that He might answer, and might direct their affairs and happenings toward the faith, of which at that time they had no knowledge, because it was not yet founded. But now that the faith is founded in Christ, and in this era of grace, the law of the Gospel has been made manifest, there is no reason to enquire of Him in that manner, nor for Him to speak or to answer as He did then. For, in giving us, as He did, His Son, which is His Word -- and He has no other -- He spake to us all together, once and for all, in this single Word, and He has no occasion to speak further.

4. And this is the sense of that passage with which Saint Paul begins, when he tries to persuade the Hebrews that they should abandon those first manners and ways of converse with God which are in the law of Moses, and should set their eyes on Christ alone, saying: *Multifariam multisque modis olim Deus loquens patribus in Prophetis: novissime autem diebus istis locutus est nobis in Filio.*<sup>401</sup> And this is as though he had said: That which God spake of old in the prophets to our fathers, in sundry ways and divers manners, He has now, at last, in these days, spoken to us once and for all in the Son. Herein the Apostle declares that God has become, as it were, dumb, and has no more to say, since that which He spake aforetime, in part to the prophets, He has now spoken altogether in Him, giving us the All, which is His Son.

5. Wherefore he that would now enquire of God, or seek any vision or revelation, would not only be acting foolishly, but would be committing an offence against God, by setting his eyes altogether upon Christ, and seeking no new thing or aught beside. And God might answer him after this manner, saying: If I have spoken all things to thee in My Word, Which is My Son, and I have no other word, what answer can I now make to thee, or what can I reveal to thee which is greater than this? Set thine eyes on Him alone, for in Him I have spoken and revealed to thee all things, and in Him thou shalt find yet more than that which thou askest and desirest. For thou askest locutions and revelations, which are the part; but if thou set thine eyes upon Him, thou shalt find the whole; for He is My complete locution and answer, and He is all My vision and all My revelation; so that I have spoken to thee, answered thee, declared to thee and revealed to thee, in giving Him to thee as thy brother, companion and master, as ransom and prize. For since that day when I descended upon Him with My Spirit on Mount Tabor, saying: *Hic est filius meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacui, ipsum audite*<sup>402</sup> (which is to say: This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him), I have left off all these manners of teaching and answering, and I have entrusted this to Him. Hear Him; for I have no more faith to reveal, neither have I any more things to declare. For, if I spake aforetime, it was to promise Christ; and, if they enquired of Me, their enquiries were directed to petitions for Christ and expectancy concerning Him, in Whom they should find every good thing (as is now set forth in all the teaching of the Evangelists and the Apostles); but now, any who would enquire of Me after that manner, and desire

---

<sup>401</sup>Hebrews i, 1.

<sup>402</sup>St. Matthew xvii, 5.

Me to speak to him or reveal aught to him, would in a sense be asking Me for Christ again, and asking Me for more faith, and be lacking in faith, which has already been given in Christ; and therefore he would be committing a great offence against My beloved Son, for not only would he be lacking in faith, but he would be obliging Him again first of all to become incarnate and pass through life and death. Thou shalt find naught to ask Me, or to desire of Me, whether revelations or visions; consider this well, for thou shalt find that all has been done for thee and all has been given to thee -- yea, and much more also -- in Him.

6. If thou desirest Me to answer thee with any word of consolation, consider My Son, Who is subject to Me, and bound by love of Me, and afflicted, and thou shalt see how fully He answers thee. If thou desirest Me to expound to thee secret things, or happenings, set thine eyes on Him alone, and thou shalt find the most secret mysteries, and the wisdom and wondrous things of God, which are hidden in Him, even as My Apostle says: *In quo sunt omnes thesauri sapientiae et scientiae Dei absconditi.*<sup>403</sup> That is: In this Son of God are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge of God. These treasures of wisdom shall be very much more sublime and delectable and profitable for thee than the things that thou desiredst to know. Herein the same Apostle gloried, saying: That he had not declared to them that he knew anything, save Jesus Christ and Him crucified.<sup>404</sup> And if thou shouldst still desire other Divine or bodily revelations and visions, look also at Him made man, and thou shalt find therein more than thou thinkest, for the Apostle says likewise: *In ipso habitat omnis plenitudo Divinitatis corporaliter.*<sup>405</sup> Which signifies: In Christ dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily.

7. It is not fitting, then, to enquire of God by supernatural means, nor is it necessary that He should answer; since all the faith has been given us in Christ, and there is therefore no more of it to be revealed, nor will there ever be. And he that now desires to receive anything in a supernatural manner, as we have said, is, as it were, finding fault with God for not having given us a complete sufficiency in His Son. For, although such a person may be assuming the faith, and believing it, nevertheless he is showing a curiosity which belongs to faithlessness. We must not expect, then, to receive instruction, or aught else, in a supernatural manner. For, at the moment when Christ gave up the ghost upon the Cross, saying, *Consummatum est*,<sup>406</sup> which signifies, 'It is finished,' an end was made, not only of all these forms, but also of all those other ceremonies and rites of the Old Law. And so we must now be guided in all things by the law of Christ made man, and by that of His Church, and of His ministers, in a human and a visible manner, and by these means we must remedy our spiritual weaknesses and ignorances, since in these means we shall find abundant medicine for them all. If we leave this path, we are guilty not only of curiosity, but of great audacity: nothing is to be believed in a supernatural way, save only that which is the teaching of Christ made man, as I say, and of His ministers, who are men. So much so that Saint Paul says these words: *Quod si Angelus de coelo evangelizaverit, praterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis, anathema sit.*<sup>407</sup> That is to say: If any angel from Heaven

---

<sup>403</sup>Colossians ii, 3.

<sup>404</sup>1 Corinthians ii, 2.

<sup>405</sup>Colossians ii, 9.

<sup>406</sup>St. John xix, 30.

<sup>407</sup>Galatians i, 8.

preach any other gospel unto you than that which we men preach unto you, let him be accursed and excommunicate.

8. Wherefore, since it is true that we must ever be guided by that which Christ taught us, and that all things else are as nothing, and are not to be believed unless they are in conformity with it, he who still desires to commune with God after the manner of the Old Law acts vainly. Furthermore, it was not lawful at that time for everyone to enquire of God, neither did God answer all men, but only the priests and prophets, from whose mouths it was that the people had to learn law and doctrine; and thus, if a man desire to know anything of God, he enquired of Him through the prophet or the priest and not of God Himself. And, if David enquired of God at certain times upon his own account, he did this because he was a prophet, and yet, even so, he did it not without the priestly vestment as it is clear was the case in the First Book of the Kings, where he said to Abimelech the priest: *Applica ad me Ephod*<sup>408</sup> -- which ephod was one of the priestly vestments, having which he then spake with God. But at other times he spake with God through the prophet Nathan and other prophets. And by the mouths of these prophets and of the priests men were to believe that that which was said to them came from God; they were not to believe it because of their own opinions.

9. And thus, men were not authorized or empowered at that time to give entire credence to what was said by God, unless it were approved by the mouths of priests and prophets. For God is so desirous that the government and direction of every man should be undertaken by another man like himself, and that every man should be ruled and governed by natural reason, that He earnestly desires us not to give entire credence to the things that He communicates to us supernaturally, nor to consider them as being securely and completely confirmed until they pass through this human aqueduct of the mouth of man. And thus, whenever He says or reveals something to a soul, He gives this same soul to whom He says it a kind of inclination to tell it to the person to whom it is fitting that it should be told. Until this has been done, it is not wont to give entire satisfaction, because the man has not taken it from another man like himself. We see in the Book of the Judges that the same thing happened to the captain Gedeon, to whom God had said many times that he should conquer the Madianites, yet he was fearful and full of doubts (for God had allowed him to retain that weakness) until he heard from the mouth of men what God had said to him. And it came to pass that, when God saw he was weak, He said to him: 'Rise up and go down to the camp.' *Et cum audieris quid loquantur, tunc confortabuntur manus tuae, et securior ad hostium castra descendes*.<sup>409</sup> That is: When thou shalt hear what men are saying there, then shalt thou receive strength in that which I have said to thee, and thou shalt go down with greater security to the hosts of the enemy. And so it came to pass that, having heard a dream related by one of the Madianites to another, wherein the Madianite had dreamed that Gedeon should conquer them, he was greatly strengthened, and began to prepare for the battle with great joy. From this it can be seen that God desired not that he should feel secure, since He gave him not the assurance by supernatural means alone, but caused him first to be strengthened by natural means.

10. And even more surprising is the thing that happened in this connection to Moses, when God had commanded him, and given him many instructions, which He continued with the signs of the wand changed into a serpent and of the leprous hand,

---

<sup>408</sup>[It was to Abiathar that this was said.] 1 Kings [A.V., 1 Samuel] xxiii, 9.

<sup>409</sup>Judges vii, 11.

enjoining him to go and set free the children of Israel. So weak was he and so uncertain<sup>410</sup> about this going forward that, although God was angered, he had not the courage to summon up the complete faith necessary for going, until God encouraged him through his brother Aaron, saying: *Aaron frater tuus Levites, scio quod eloquent sit: ecce ipse egredietur in occursum tuum, vidensque te, laetabitur corde. Loquere ad eum, en pone verba mea in ore ejus: et ego ero in ore tuo, et in ore illius*, etc.<sup>411</sup> Which is as though He had said: I know that thy brother Aaron is an eloquent man: behold, he will come forth to meet thee, and, when he seeth thee, he will be glad at heart; speak to him and tell him all My words, and I will be in thy mouth and in his mouth, so that each of you shall believe that which is in the mouth of the other.

11. Having heard these words, Moses at once took courage, in the hope of finding consolation in the counsel which his brother was to give him; for this is a characteristic of the humble soul, which dares not converse alone with God, neither can be completely satisfied without human counsel and guidance. And that this should be given to it is the will of God, for He draws near to those who come together to converse of truth, in order to expound and confirm it in them, upon a foundation of natural reason, even as He said that He would do when Moses and Aaron should come together -- namely, that He would be in the mouth of the one and in the mouth of the other. Wherefore He said likewise in the Gospel that *Ubi fuerint duo vel tres congregati in nomine meo, ibi sum ego in medio eorum*.<sup>412</sup> That is: Where two or three have come together, in order to consider that which is for the greater honour and glory of My name, there am I in the midst of them. That is to say, I will make clear and confirm in their hearts the truths of God. And it is to be observed that He said not: Where there is one alone, there will I be; but: Where there are at least two. In this way He showed that God desires not that any man by himself alone should believe his experiences to be of God,<sup>413</sup> or should act in conformity with them, or rely upon them, but rather should believe the Church and<sup>414</sup> her ministers, for God will not make clear and confirm the truth in the heart of one who is alone, and thus such a one will be weak and cold.

12. Hence comes that whereon the Preacher insists, where he says: *Vae soli, quia cum ceciderit, non habet sublevantem se. Si dormierint duo, fovebuntur mutuo; unus quomodo calefiet? et si quispiam praevaluerit contra unum, duo resistent ei*.<sup>415</sup> Which signifies: Woe to the man that is alone, for when he falleth he hath none to raise him up. If two sleep together, the one shall give warmth to the other (that is to say: with the warmth of God Who is between them); but one alone, how shall he be warm? That is to say: How shall he be other than cold as to the things of God? And if any man can fight and prevail against one enemy (that is, the devil, who can fight and prevail against those that are alone and desire to be alone as regards the things of God), two men together will resist him -- that is, the disciple and the master<sup>416</sup> who come together to know and dost the truth. And until this happens such a man is habitually weak and feeble in the truth, however often he may have heard it from God; so much so that,

---

<sup>410</sup>[*Lit.*, 'and so dark.']

<sup>411</sup>Exodus iv, 14-15.

<sup>412</sup>St. Matthew xviii, 20.

<sup>413</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the things which he has to be of God.']

<sup>414</sup>[*Lit.*, '... with them, without the Church or...']

<sup>415</sup>Ecclesiasties iv, 10-12.

<sup>416</sup>[i.e., the penitent and the confessor or director.]

despite the many occasions on which Saint Paul preached the Gospel, which he said that he had heard, not of men, but of God, he could not be satisfied until he had gone to consult with Saint Peter and the Apostles, saying: *Ne forte in vacuum currerem, aut cucurrissem.*<sup>417</sup> Which signifies: Perchance he should run, or had run, in vain, having no assurance of himself, until man had given him assurance. This seems a noteworthy thing, O Paul, that He Who revealed to thee this Gospel could not likewise reveal to thee the assurance of the fault which thou mightest have committed in preaching the truth concerning Him.

13. Herein it is clearly shown that a man must not rely upon the things that God reveals, save in the way that we are describing; for, even in cases where a person is in possession of certainty, as Saint Paul was certain of his Gospel (since he had already begun to preach it), yet, although the revelation be of God, man may still err with respect to it, or in things relating to it. For, although God reveals one thing, He reveals not always the other; and oftentimes He reveals something without revealing the way in which it is to be done. For ordinarily He neither performs nor reveals anything that can be accomplished by human counsel and effort, although He may commune with the soul for a long time, very lovingly. Of this Saint Paul was very well aware, since, as we say, although he knew that the Gospel was revealed to him by God, he went to take counsel with Saint Peter. And we see this clearly in the Book of Exodus, where God had communed most familiarly with Moses, yet had never given him that salutary counsel which was given him by his father-in-law Jethro -- that is to say, that he should choose other judges to assist him, so that the people should not be waiting from morning till night.<sup>418</sup> This counsel God approved, though it was not He Who had given it to him, for it was a thing that fell within the limits of human judgment and reason. With respect to Divine visions and revelations and locutions, God is not wont to reveal them, for He is ever desirous that men should make such use of their own reason as is possible, and all such things have to be governed by reason, save those that are of faith, which transcend all judgment and reason, although these are not contrary to faith.

14. Wherefore let none think that, because it may be true that God and the saints commune with him familiarly about many things, they will of necessity explain to him the faults that he commits with regard to anything, if it be possible for him to recognize these faults by other means. He can have no assurance about this; for, as we read came to pass in the Acts of the Apostles, Saint Peter, though a prince of the Church, who was taught directly by God, went astray nevertheless with respect to a certain ceremony that was in use among the Gentiles, and God was silent. So far did he stray that Saint Paul reprov'd him, as he affirms, saying: *Cum vidissem, quod non recte ad veritatem Evangelii ambularent, dixi coram omnibus: Si tu judaeus cum sis, gentiliter vivis, quomodo Gentes cogis judaizare?*<sup>419</sup> Which signifies: When I saw (says Saint Paul) that the disciples walked not uprightly according to the truth of the Gospel, I said to Peter before them all: If thou, being a Jew, as thou art, livest after the manner of the Gentiles, how feignest thou to force the Gentiles to live as do the Jews? And God reprov'd not Saint Peter Himself for this fault, for that stimulation was a thing that had to do with reason, and it was possible for him to know it by rational means.

15. Wherefore on the day of judgment God will punish for their many faults and

---

<sup>417</sup>Galatians ii, 2.

<sup>418</sup>Exodus xviii, 21-2.

<sup>419</sup>Galatians ii, 14.



sins many souls with whom He may quite habitually have held converse here below, and to whom He may have given much light and virtue; for, as to those things that they have known that they ought to do, they have been neglectful, and have relied upon that converse that they have had with God and upon the virtue that He has given them. And thus, as Christ says in the Gospel, they will marvel at that time, saying: *Domine, Domine, nonne in nomine tuo prophetavimus, et in nomine tuo daemonia eiecimus, et in nomine tuo virtutes multas fecimus?*<sup>420</sup> That is: Lord, Lord, were the prophecies that Thou spakest to us perchance not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name cast we not out devils? And in Thy name performed we not many miracles and mighty works? And the Lord says that He will answer them in these words: *Et tunc confitebor illis, quia numquam novi vos: discedite a me omnes qui operamini iniquitatem.*<sup>421</sup> That is to say: Depart from Me, ye workers of iniquity, for I never knew you. Of the number of these was the prophet Balaam and others like to him, who, though God spake with them and gave them thanks, were sinners. But the Lord will likewise give their proportion of reproof to His friends and chosen ones, with whom He communed familiarly here below, as to the faults and sins of neglect that they may have committed; whereof there was no need that God should Himself warn them, since He had already warned them through the natural reason and law that He had given to them.

16. In concluding this part of my subject, therefore, I say, and I infer from what has already been said, that anything, of whatsoever kind, received by the soul through supernatural means, must clearly and plainly, fully and simply, be at once communicated to the spiritual director. For although there may seem no reason to speak of it, or to spend time upon doing so, since the soul is acting safely, as we have said, if it rejects it and neither pays heed to it nor desires it -- especially if it be a question of visions or revelations or other supernatural communications, which are either quite clear or very nearly so -- nevertheless, it is very necessary to give an account of all these, although it may seem to the soul that there is no reason for so doing. And this for three causes. First, because, as we have said, God communicates many things, the effect, power, light and certainty whereof He confirms not wholly in the soul, until, as we have said, the soul consults him whom God has given to it as a spiritual judge, which is he that has the power to bind or to loose, and to approve or to blame, as we have shown by means of the passages quoted above; and we can show it clearly by experience, for we see humble souls to whom these things come to pass, and who, after discussing them with the proper persons, experience a new satisfaction, power, light and certainty; so much so that to some it seems that they have no effect upon them, nor do they even belong to them, until they have communicated them to the director, whereupon they are given to them anew.

17. The second cause is that the soul habitually needs instruction upon the things that come to pass within it, so that it may be led by that means to spiritual poverty and detachment, which is the dark night. For if it begins to relinquish this instruction -- even when it desires not the things referred to -- it will gradually, without realizing it, become callous as it treads the spiritual road, and draw near again to the road of sense; and it is partly with respect to this that these distinct things happen.

18. The third cause is that, for the sake of the humility and submission and mortification of the soul, it is well to relate everything to the director, even though he

---

<sup>420</sup>St. Matthew vii, 22.

<sup>421</sup>St. Matthew vii, 23.

make<sup>422</sup> no account of it all and consider it of no importance. There are some souls who greatly dislike speaking of such things, because they think them to be unimportant, and know not how the person to whom they should relate them will receive them; but this is lack of humility, and for that very reason it is needful for them to submit themselves and relate these things. And there are others who are very timid in relating them, because they see no reason why they should have these experiences, which seem to belong to saints, as well as other things which they are sorry to have to describe; for which cause they think there is no reason to speak of them because they make no account of them; but for this very reason it is well for them to mortify themselves and relate them, until in time they come to speak of them humbly, unaffectedly, submissively and readily, and after this they will always find it easy to do so.

19. But, with respect to what has been said, it must be pointed out that, although we have insisted so much that such things should be set aside, and that confessors should not encourage their penitents to discuss them, it is not well that spiritual fathers should show displeasure in regard to them, or should seek to avoid speaking of them or despise them, or make their penitents reserved and afraid to mention them, for it would be the means of causing them many inconveniences if the door were closed upon their relating them. For, since they are a means and manner whereby God guides such souls, there is no reason for thinking ill of them or for being alarmed or scandalized by them; but rather there is a reason for proceeding very quietly and kindly, for encouraging these souls and giving them an opportunity to speak of these things; if necessary, they must be exhorted to speak; and, in view of the difficulty that some souls experience in describing such matters, this is sometimes quite essential. Let confessors direct their penitents into faith,<sup>423</sup> advising them frankly to turn away their eyes from all such things, teaching them how to void the desire and the spirit of them, so that they may make progress, and giving them to understand how much more precious in God's sight is one work or act of the will performed in charity than are all the visions and communications that they may receive from Heaven, since these imply neither merit nor demerit. Let them point out, too, that many souls who have known nothing of such things have made incomparably greater progress than others who have received many of them.

## CHAPTER XXIII

*Which begins to treat of the apprehensions of the understanding that come in a purely spiritual way, and describes their nature.*

ALTHOUGH the instruction that we have given with respect to the apprehensions of the understanding which come by means of sense is somewhat brief, in comparison with what might be said about them, I have not desired to write of them at greater length; I believe, indeed, that I have already been too lengthy for the fulfillment of my present intention, which is to disencumber the understanding of them and direct the soul into the night of faith. Wherefore we shall now begin to treat of those other four apprehensions

---

<sup>422</sup>[The Spanish phrase equally admits the reading: 'even though the soul make.']

<sup>423</sup>[i.e., into the night of faith: cf. Chap. xxiii, ¶ 4, below.]

of the understanding, which, as we said in the tenth chapter,<sup>424</sup> are purely spiritual -- namely, visions, revelations, locutions and spiritual feelings. These we call purely spiritual, for they do not (as do those that are corporeal and imaginary) communicate themselves to the understanding by way of the corporeal senses; but, without the intervention of any inward or outward corporeal sense, they present themselves to the understanding, clearly and distinctly, by supernatural means, passively -- that is to say, without the performance of any act or operation on the part of the soul itself, at the least actively.

2. It must be known, then, that, speaking broadly and in general terms, all these four apprehensions may be called visions of the soul; for we term the understanding of the soul also its sight. And since all these apprehensions are intelligible to the understanding, they are described, in a spiritual sense, as 'visible.' And thus the kinds of intelligence that are formed in the understanding may be called intellectual visions. Now, since all the objects of the other senses, which are all that can be seen, and all that can be heard, and all that can be smelt and tasted and touched, are objects of the understanding in so far as they fall within the limits of truth or falsehood, it follows that, just as to the eyes of the body all that is visible in a bodily way causes bodily vision, even so, to the spiritual eyes of the soul -- namely, the understanding -- all that is intelligible causes spiritual vision; for, as we have said, for the soul to understand is for it to see. And thus, speaking generally, we may call these four apprehensions visions. This cannot be said, however, of the other senses, for no one of them is capable, as such, of receiving the object of another one.

3. But, since these apprehensions present themselves to the soul in the same way as they do to the various senses, it follows that, speaking properly and specifically, we shall describe that which the understanding receives by means of sight (because it can see things spiritually, even as the eyes can see bodily) as a vision; and that which it receives by apprehending and understanding new things (as it were through the hearing, when it hears things that are not heard) we describe as revelation; and that which it receives by means of hearing we call locution; and that which it receives through the other senses, such as the perception of sweet spiritual fragrance, and spiritual taste and of spiritual delight which the soul may joy supernaturally, we call spiritual feelings. From all these the soul derives spiritual vision or intelligence, without any kind of apprehension concerning form, image or figure of natural fancy or imagination; these things are communicated to the soul directly by supernatural means and a supernatural process.

4. Of these, likewise (even as we said of the other imaginary corporeal apprehensions), it is well that we should here disencumber the understanding, leading and directing it by means of them into the spiritual night of faith, to the Divine and substantial union of God; lest, by letting such things encumber and stultify it, it should be hindered upon the road to solitude and detachment from all things, which is necessary to that end. For, although these apprehensions are nobler and more profitable and much more certain than those which are corporeal and imaginary, inasmuch as they are interior and purely spiritual, and are those which the devil is least able to counterfeit, since they are communicated to the soul more purely and subtly without any effort of its own or of the imagination, at least actively, yet not only may the

---

<sup>424</sup>It is in Chapter x (and not in viii, as is said in A, B and e.p.) that the author treats of these spiritual apprehensions.

understanding be encumbered by them upon this road, but it is possible for it, through its own imprudence, to be sorely deceived.

5. And although, in one sense, we might conclude with these four kinds of apprehension, by treating them all together and giving advice which applies to them all, as we have given concerning all the others -- namely, that they should neither be desired nor aspired to -- yet, since we shall presently throw more light upon the way in which this is to be done, and certain things will be said in connection with them, it will be well to treat of each one of them in particular, and thus we shall now speak of the first apprehensions, which are intellectual or spiritual visions.

## CHAPTER XXIV

*Which treats of two kinds of spiritual vision that come supernaturally.*

SPEAKING now strictly of those visions which are spiritual, and are received without the intervention of any bodily sense, I say that there are two kinds of vision than can be received by the understanding: the one kind is of corporeal substances; the other, of incorporeal or separated substances. The corporeal visions have respect to all material things that are in Heaven and on earth, which the soul is able to see, even while it is still in the body, by the aid of a certain supernatural illumination, derived from God, wherein it is able to see all things that are not present, both in Heaven and on earth, even as Saint John saw, as we read in the twenty-first chapter of the Apocalypse, where he describes and relates the excellence of the celestial Jerusalem, which he saw in Heaven. Even so, again, we read of Saint Benedict that in a spiritual vision he saw the whole world.<sup>425</sup> This vision, says Saint Thomas in the first of his Quodlibets, was in the light that is derived from above, as we have said.

2. The other visions, which are of incorporeal substances, cannot be seen by the aid of this derived illumination, whereof we are here speaking, but only by another and a higher illumination which is called the illumination of glory. And thus these visions of incorporeal substances, such as angels and soul, are not of this life, neither can they be seen in the mortal body; for, if God were pleased to communicate them to the soul, in essence as they are, the soul would at once go forth from the flesh and would be loosed from this mortal life. For this reason God said to Moses, when he entreated Him to show him His Essence: *Non videbit me homo, et vivet.*<sup>426</sup> That is: Man shall not see Me and be able to remain alive. Wherefore, when the children of Israel thought that they were to see God, or had seen Him, or some angel, they feared death, as we read in the Book of Exodus, where, fearing these things, they said: *Non loquatur nobis Dominus, ne forte moriamur.*<sup>427</sup> As if they had said: Let not God communicate Himself to us openly, lest we die. And likewise in the Book of Judges, Manue, father of Samson, thought that he and his wife had seen in essence the angel who spake with them (and who had appeared to them in the form of a most beautiful man) and he said to his wife: *Morte*

---

<sup>425</sup>St. Gregory: *Dial.*, Bk. 11, Chap. xxxv. 'Omnis etiam mundus velut sub uno solis radio collectus, ante oculos eius adductus est.'

<sup>426</sup>Exodus xxxiii, 20.

<sup>427</sup>Exodus xx, 19.

*moriemur, quida vidimus Dominum.*<sup>428</sup> Which signifies: We shall die, because we have seen the Lord.<sup>429</sup>

3. And thus these visions occur not in this life, save occasionally and fleetingly, when, making an exception to the conditions which govern our natural life, God so allows it. At such times He totally withdraws the spirit from this life, and the natural functions of the body are supplied by His favour. This is why, at the time when it is thought that Saint Paul saw these (namely, the incorporeal substances in the third heaven), that Saint says: *Sive in corpore, nescio, sive extra corpus, nescio, Deus scit.*<sup>430</sup> That is, he was raptured, and of that which he saw he says that he knows not if it was in the body or out of the body, but that God knows. Herein it is clearly seen that the limits of natural means of communication were passed, and that this was the work of God. Likewise, it is believed that God showed His Essence to Moses, for we read that God said to him that He would set him in the cleft of the rock, and would protect him, by covering him with His right hand, and protecting him so that he should not die when His glory passed; the which glory passed indeed, and was shown to him fleetingly, and the natural life of Moses was protected by the right hand of God.<sup>431</sup> But these visions that were so substantial -- like that of Saint Paul and Moses, and that of our father Elias, when he covered his face at the gentle whisper of God -- although they are fleeting, occur only very rarely -- indeed, hardly ever and to very few; for God performs such a thing in those that are very strong in the spirit of the Church and the law of God, as were the three men named above.

4. But, although these visions of spiritual substances cannot be unveiled and be clearly seen in this life by the understanding, they can nevertheless be felt in the substance of the soul, with the sweetest touches and unions, all of which belongs to spiritual feelings, whereof, with the Divine favour, we shall treat presently; for our pen is being directed and guided to these -- that is to say, to the Divine bond and union of the soul with Divine Substance. We shall speak of this when we treat of the dark and confused mystical understanding which remains to be described, wherein we shall show how, by means of this dark and loving knowledge, God is united with the soul in a lofty and Divine degree;<sup>432</sup> for, after some manner, this dark and loving knowledge, which is

---

<sup>428</sup>Judges xiii, 22.

<sup>429</sup>E.p. abbreviates this paragraph thus: 'The other visions, which are of incorporeal substances, demand another and a higher illumination; and thus these visions of incorporeal substances, such as angels and souls, do not occur habitually, nor are they proper to this life; still less is that of the Divine Essence, which is proper to the Blessed in Heaven, save that it may be communicated to a soul fleetingly and as in passing.' The next two paragraphs are omitted from e.p. P. Jer—nimo de San JosŽ, in the edition of 1630, copies from e.p. the lines given in this note above, and then continues: '[save when] God so allows, in spite of the condition of our natural life, withdrawing the spirit from it occasionally, as happened to the apostle Saint Paul, when he says that he saw unspeakable secrets in the third heaven.' The adjustments made by P. Salablanca and amplified by P. Jer—nimo in the rest of the paragraph [cf. notes below] follow the most usual scholastic doctrine. Among the Discalced Carmelite writers who deal most fully and competently with this doctrine of spiritual visions are the authors of the *Cursas Theologiae Mysticae*, Vol. IV, Disp. xx, xxi; Felipe de la Sant'sima Trinidad: *Summa Theologiae Mysticae*, Pt. II, Tract. III, Disc. iv; *Mždula M'stica*, Trat. VI. St. Thomas (I p., q. 88, a. 1) says that we cannot *quidditative* know separated substances.

<sup>430</sup>2 Corinthians xii, 2.

<sup>431</sup>Exodus xxxiii, 22.

<sup>432</sup>This description the Saint probably accomplished, or intended to accomplish, in his commentaries on the last five stanzas of the *Dark Night*, which have not come down to us.

faith, serves as a means to Divine union in this life, even as, in the next life, the light of glory serves as an intermediary to the clear vision of God.

5. Let us, then, now treat of the visions of corporeal substances, received spiritually in the soul, which come after the manner of bodily visions. For, just as the eyes see bodily visions by means of natural light, even so does the soul, through the understanding, by means of supernaturally derived light, as we have said, see those same natural things inwardly, together with others, as God wills; the difference between the two kinds of vision is only in the mode and manner of them. For spiritual and intellectual visions are much clearer and subtler than those which pertain to the body. For, when God is pleased to grant this favour to the soul, He communicates to it that supernatural light whereof we speak, wherein the soul sees the things that God wills it to see, easily and most clearly, whether they be of Heaven or of earth, and the absence or presence of them is no hindrance to the vision. And it is at times as though a door were opened before it into a great brightness, through which the soul sees a light, after the manner of a lightning flash, which, on a dark night, reveals things suddenly, and causes them to be clearly and distinctly seen, and then leaves them in darkness, although the forms and figures of them remain in the fancy. This comes to pass much more perfectly in the soul, because those things that the spirit has seen in that light remain impressed upon it in such a way that whensoever it observes them it sees them in itself as it saw them before; even as in a mirror the forms that are in it are seen whensoever a man looks in it, and in such a way that those forms of the things that he has seen are never wholly removed from his soul, although in course of time they become somewhat remote.

6. The effect which these visions produce in the soul is that of quiet, illumination, joy like that of glory, sweetness, purity and love, humility and inclination or elevation of the spirit in God; sometimes more so, at other times less; with sometimes more of one thing, at other times more of another, according to the spirit wherein they are received and according as God wills.

7. The devil likewise can produce these visions, by means of a certain natural light, whereby he brings things clearly before the mind, through spiritual suggestion, whether they be present or absent. There is that passage in Saint Matthew, which says of the devil and Christ: *Ostendit omnia regna mundi, et gloriam eorum*.<sup>433</sup> That is so say: He showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. Concerning this certain doctors say that he did it by spiritual suggestion,<sup>434</sup> for it was not possible to make Him see so much with the bodily eyes as all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. But there is much difference between these visions that are caused by the devil and those that are of God. For the effects produced in the soul by the devil's visions are not like those produced by good visions; the former produce aridity of spirit as to communion with God and an inclination to esteem oneself highly, and to receive and set store by the visions aforesaid, and in no wise do they produce the gentleness of humility and love of God. Neither do the forms of such visions remain impressed upon the soul with the sweetness and brightness of the others; nor do they last, but are quickly effaced from the soul, save when the soul greatly esteems them, in which case this high esteem itself causes it to recall them naturally, but with great aridity of spirit,

---

<sup>433</sup>St. Matthew iv, 8.

<sup>434</sup>E.p.: ' . . . by intelligible suggestion.' On this passage, cf. Cornelius a Lapide (*Commentaria in Matthaeum*, Cap. IV) and St. Thomas (III p., q. 41, ad. 3).

and without producing that effect of love and humility which is produced by good visions when the soul recalls them.

8. These visions, inasmuch as they are of creatures, wherewith God has no essential conformity or proportion, cannot serve the understanding as a proximate means to union with God. And thus the soul must conduct itself in a purely negative way concerning them, as in the other things that we have described, in order that it may progress by the proximate means -- namely, by faith. Wherefore the soul must make no store of treasure of the forms of such visions as remain impressed upon it, neither must it lean upon them; for to do this would be to be encumbered with those forms, images and persons which remain inwardly within it, and thus the soul would not progress toward God by denying itself all things. For, even if these forms should be permanently set before the soul, they will not greatly hinder this progress, if the soul has no desire to set store by them. For, although it is true that the remembrance of them impels the soul to a certain love of God and contemplation, yet it is impelled and exalted much more by pure faith and detachment in darkness from them all, without its knowing how or whence it comes to it. And thus it will come to pass that the soul will go forward, enkindled with yearnings of purest love for God, without knowing whence they come to it, or on what they are founded. The fact is that, while faith has become ever more deeply rooted and infused in the soul by means of that emptiness and darkness and detachment from all things, or spiritual poverty, all of which may be spoken of as one and the same thing, at the same time the charity of God has become rooted and infused in the soul ever more deeply also. Wherefore, the more the soul desires obscurity and annihilation with respect to all the outward or inward things that it is capable of receiving, the more is it infused by faith, and, consequently, by love and hope, since all these three theological virtues go together.

9. But at certain times the soul neither understands this love nor feels it; for this love resides, not in sense, with its tender feelings, but in the soul, with fortitude and with a courage and daring that are greater than they were before, though sometimes it overflows into sense and produces gentle and tender feelings. Wherefore, in order to attain to that love, joy and delight which such visions produce and cause in the soul, it is well that soul should have fortitude and mortification and love, so that it may desire to remain in emptiness and darkness as to all things, and to build its love and joy upon that which it neither sees nor feels, neither can see nor feel in this life, which is God, Who is incomprehensible and transcends all things. It is well, then, for us to journey to Him by denying ourselves everything. For otherwise, even if the soul be so wise, humble and strong that the devil cannot deceive it by visions or cause it to fall into some sin of presumption, as he is wont to do, he will not allow it to make progress; for he set obstacles in the way of spiritual detachment and poverty of spirit and emptiness in faith, which is the essential condition for union of the soul with God.

10. And, as the same teaching that we gave in the nineteenth and twentieth chapters, concerning supernatural apprehensions and visions of sense, holds good for these visions, we shall not spend more time here in describing them.

## CHAPTER XXV

*Which treats of revelations, describing their nature and making a distinction between them.*

ACCORDING to the order which we are here following, we have next to treat of the second kind of spiritual apprehension, which we have described above as revelations, and which properly belongs to the spirit of prophecy. With respect to this, it must first be known that revelation is naught else than the discovery of some hidden truth or the manifestation of some secret or mystery. Thus God may cause the soul to understand something by making clear to the understanding the truth concerning it, or He may reveal to the soul certain things which He is doing or proposes to do.

2. Accordingly, we may say that there are two kinds of revelation. The first is the disclosure to the understanding of truths which are properly called intellectual knowledge or intelligence; the second is the manifestation of secrets, which are called revelations with more propriety than the others. For the first kind cannot strictly be called revelations, since they consist in this, that God causes the soul to understand naked truths, not only with respect to temporal things, but likewise with respect to spiritual things, revealing them to the soul clearly and openly. These I have desired to treat under the heading of revelations: first, because they have close kinship and similarity with them: secondly, in order not to multiply distinctions.

3. According to this method, then, we shall now be well able to divide revelations into two kinds of apprehension. The one kind we shall call intellectual knowledge, and the other, the manifestation of secrets and hidden mysteries of God. With these we shall conclude in two chapters as briefly as we may, and in this chapter following we shall treat of the first.

## CHAPTER XXVI

*Which treats of the intuition of naked truths in the understanding, explaining how they are of two kinds and how the soul is to conduct itself with respect to them.*

IN order to speak properly of this intuition of naked truths which is conveyed to the understanding, the writer would need God to take his hand and to guide his pen; for know, dear reader, that what they are to the soul cannot be expressed in words. But, since I speak not of them here of set purpose, but only that through them I may instruct the soul and lead it to Divine union, I shall suffer myself to speak of them here in a brief and modified form, as is sufficient for the fulfillment of that intention.

2. This kind of vision (or, to speak more properly, of knowledge of naked truths) is very different from that of which we have just spoken in the twenty-fourth chapter. For it is not like seeing bodily things with the understanding; it consists rather in comprehending and seeing with the understanding the truths of God, whether of things that are, that have been or that will be, which is in close conformity with the spirit of prophecy, as perchance we shall explain hereafter.

3. Here it is to be observed that this kind of knowledge is distinguishable according to two divisions: the one kind comes to the soul with respect to the Creator; the other with respect to creatures, as we have said. And, although both kinds are very delectable to the soul, yet the delight caused in it by the kind that relates to God is comparable to nothing whatsoever, and there are no words or terms wherein it can be described. This kind of knowledge is of God Himself, and the delight is in God Himself,



whereof David says: 'There is naught soever like to Him.'<sup>435</sup> For this kind of knowledge comes to the soul in direct relation to God, when the soul, after a most lofty manner, has a perception of some attribute of God -- of His omnipotence, of His might, of His goodness and sweetness, etc.; and, whensoever it has such a perception, that which is perceived cleaves to the soul. Inasmuch as this is pure contemplation, the soul clearly sees that there is no way wherein it can say aught concerning it, save to speak in certain general terms, of the abundance of delight and blessing which it has felt, and this is expressed by souls that experience it; but not to the end that what the soul has experienced and perceived may be wholly apprehended.

4. And thus David, speaking for himself when something of this kind had happened to him, used only common and general terms, saying: *Judicia Domini vera, justificata in semetipsa. Desiderabilia super aurum et lapidem pretiosum multum; et dulciora super mel et favum.*<sup>436</sup> Which signifies: The judgments of God -- that is, the virtues and attributes which we perceive in God -- are in themselves true, justified, more to be desired than gold and very much more than precious stones, and sweeter than the honeycomb and honey. And concerning Moses we read that, when God gave him a most lofty manifestation of knowledge from Himself on an occasion when He passed before him, he said only that which can be expressed in the common terms above mentioned. And it was so that, when the Lord passed before him in that manifestation of knowledge, Moses quickly prostrated himself upon the ground, saying: *Dominator Domine Deus, misericors et clemens, patiens, et multae miserationis, ac verax. Qui custodis misericordiam in millia.*<sup>437</sup> Which signifies: Ruler,<sup>438</sup> Lord, God, merciful and clement, patient, and of great compassion, and true, that keepest mercy promised unto thousands. Here it is seen that Moses could not express that which he had learned from God in one single manifestation of knowledge, and therefore he expressed and gave utterance to it in all these words. And although at times, when such knowledge is given to a soul, words are used, the soul is well aware that it has expressed no part of what it has felt; for it knows that there is no fit name by which it can name it. And thus Saint Paul, when he was granted that lofty knowledge of God, made no attempt to describe it, saying only that it was not lawful for man to speak of it.

5. These Divine manifestations of knowledge which have respect to God never relate to particular matters, inasmuch as they concern the Chief Beginning, and therefore can have no particular reference, unless it be a question of some truth concerning a thing less than God, which is involved in the perception of the whole; but these Divine manifestations themselves -- no, in no way whatsoever. And these lofty manifestations of knowledge can come only to the soul that attains to union with God, for they are themselves that union; and to receive them is equivalent to a certain contact with the Divinity which the soul experiences, and thus it is God Himself Who is perceived and tasted therein. And, although He cannot be experienced manifestly and clearly, as in glory, this touch of knowledge and delight is nevertheless so sublime and profound that it penetrates the substance of the soul, and the devil cannot meddle with it or produce any manifestation like to it, for there is no such thing, neither is there aught that compares with it, neither can he infuse pleasure or delight that is like to it; for such

---

<sup>435</sup>[Psalm xxxix, 6: cf. A.V., xl, 5.]

<sup>436</sup>Psalm xviii, 10-11 [A.V., xix, 9-10].

<sup>437</sup>Exodus xxxiv, 6-7.

<sup>438</sup>[*Lit.*, 'Emperor.']

kinds of knowledge savour of the Divine Essence and of eternal life, and the devil cannot counterfeit a thing so lofty.

6. Nevertheless he might make some pretence of imitating it, by representing to the soul certain great matters and things which enchant the senses and can readily be perceived by them, and endeavoring to persuade the soul that these are God; but he cannot do this in such wise that they enter into the substance of the soul and of a sudden renew it and enkindle it with love, as do the manifestations of God. For there are certain kinds of knowledge, and certain of these touches effected by God in the substance of the soul, which enrich it after such wise that not only does one of them suffice to take from the soul once and for all the whole of the imperfections that it had itself been unable to throw off during its whole life, but it leaves the soul full of virtues and blessings from God.

7. And these touches are so delectable to the soul, and the delight they produce is so intimate, that if it received only one of them it would consider itself well rewarded for all the trials that it had suffered in this life, even had they been innumerable; and it is so greatly encouraged and given such energy to suffer many things for God's sake that it suffers especially in seeing that it is not suffering more.

8. The soul cannot attain to these lofty degrees of knowledge by means of any comparison or imagination of its own, because they are loftier than all these; and so God works them in the soul without making use of its own capacities. Wherefore, at certain times, when the soul is least thinking of it and least desiring it, God is wont to give it these Divine touches, by causing it certain remembrances of Himself. And these are sometimes suddenly caused in the soul by its mere recollection of certain things -- sometimes of very small things. And they are so readily perceived that at times they cause not only the soul, but also the body, to tremble. But at other times they come to pass in the spirit when it is very tranquil, without any kind of trembling, but with a sudden sense of delight and spiritual refreshment.

9. At other times, again, they come when the soul repeats or hears some word, perhaps from Scripture or possibly from some other source; but they are not always equally efficacious and sensible, for oftentimes they are extremely faint; yet, however faint they may be, one of these recollections and touches of God is more profitable to the soul than many other kinds of knowledge or many meditations upon the creatures and the works of God. And, since these manifestations of knowledge come to the soul suddenly, and independently of its own free will, it must neither desire to have them, nor desire not to have them; but must merely be humble and resigned concerning them, and God will perform His work how and when He wills.

10. And I say not that the soul should behave in the same negative manner with regard to these apprehensions as with regard to the rest, for, as we have said, they are a part of the union towards which we are leading the soul, to which end we are teaching it to detach and strip itself of all other apprehensions. And the means by which God will do this must be humility and suffering for love of God with resignation as regards all reward; for these favours are not granted to the soul which still cherishes attachments, inasmuch as they are granted through a very special love of God toward the soul which loves Him likewise with great detachment. It is to this that the Son of God referred, in Saint John, when He said: *Qui autem diligit me, diligetur a Patre meo, et ego diligam eum, et manifestabo ei me ipsum.*<sup>439</sup> Which signifies: He that loves Me shall be loved by

---

<sup>439</sup>St. John xiv, 21.

My Father, and I will love him and will manifest Myself to him. Herein are included the kinds of knowledge and touches to which we are referring, which God manifests to the soul that truly loves Him.

11. The second kind of knowledge or vision of interior truths is very different from this that we have described, since it is of things lower than God. And herein is included the perception of the truth of things in themselves, and that of the events and happenings which come to pass among men. And this knowledge is of such a kind that, when the soul learns these truths, they sink into it, independently of any suggestion from without, to such an extent that, although it may be given a different interpretation of them, it cannot make inward assent to this, even though it endeavor to do so by putting forth a great effort; for within the spirit it is learning otherwise through the spirit that is teaching it that thing, which is equivalent to seeing it clearly. This pertains to the spirit of prophecy and to the grace which Saint Paul calls the gift of the discernment of spirits.<sup>440</sup> Yet, although the soul holds something which it understands to be quite certain and true, as we have said, and although it may be unable to cease giving it that passive interior consent, it must not therefore cease to believe and to give the consent of reason to that which its spiritual director tells it and commands it, even though this may be quite contrary to its own feelings, so that it may be directed in faith to Divine union, to which a soul must journey by believing rather than by understanding.

12. Concerning both these things we have clear testimonies in Scripture. For, with respect to the spiritual knowledge of things that may be acquired, the Wise Man says these words: *Ipse dedit mihi horum, quae sunt, scientiam veram, ut sciam dispositionem orbis terrarum, et virtutes elementorum, initium et consummationem temporum, vicissitudinum permutationes, et consummationes temporum, et morum mutationes, divisiones temporum, et anni cursus, et stellarum dispositiones, naturas animalium et iras bestiarum, vim ventorum, et cogitationes hominum, differentias virgultorum, et virtutes radicum, et quaecumque sunt abscondita, et improvisa didici: omnium enim artifex docuit me sapientia.*<sup>441</sup> Which signifies: God hath given me true knowledge of things that are: to know the disposition of the round world<sup>442</sup> and the virtues of the elements; the beginning, and ending, and midst of the times, the alterations in the changes and the consummations of the seasons, and the changes of customs, the divisions of the seasons, the courses of the year and the dispositions of the stars; the natures of animals, and the furies of the beasts, the strength and virtue of the winds, and the thoughts of men; the diversities in plants and trees and the virtues of roots and all things that are hidden, and those that are not foreseen: all these I learned, for Wisdom, which is the worker of all things, taught me. And although this knowledge which the Wise Man here says that God gave him concerning all things was infused and general, the passage quoted furnishes sufficient evidence for all particular kinds of knowledge which God infuses into souls, by supernatural means, when He wills. And this not that He may give them a general habit of knowledge as He gave to Solomon in the matters aforementioned; but that He may reveal to them at times certain truths with respect to any of all these things that the Wise Man here enumerates. Although it is true that into many souls Our Lord infuses habits which relate to many things, yet these are never of so general a kind as they were in the case of Solomon. The differences

---

<sup>440</sup>1 Corinthians xii, 10.

<sup>441</sup>Wisdom vii, 17-21.

<sup>442</sup>[*Lit.*, 'of the roundness of the lands.']

between them are like to those between the gifts distributed by God which are enumerated by Saint Paul; among these he sets wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy, discernment or knowledge of spirits, understanding of tongues, interpretation of spoken words, etc.<sup>443</sup> All these kinds of knowledge are infused habits, which God gives freely to whom He will, whether naturally or supernaturally; naturally, as to Balaam, to other idolatrous prophets and to many sybils, to whom He gave the spirit of prophecy; and supernaturally, as to the holy prophets and apostles and other saints.

13. But over and above these habits or graces freely bestowed,<sup>444</sup> what we say is that persons who are perfect or are making progress in perfection are wont very commonly to receive enlightenment and knowledge of things present or absent; these they know through their spirit, which is already enlightened and purged. We can interpret that passage from the Proverbs in this sense, namely: *Quomodo in aquis resplendent vultus prospicientium sic corda hominum manifesta sunt prudentibus.*<sup>445</sup> Even as there appear in the waters the faces of those that look therein, so the hearts of men are manifest to the prudent. This is understood of those that have the wisdom of saints, which the sacred Scripture calls prudence. And in this way these spirits sometimes learn of other things also, although not whensoever they will; for this belongs only to those that have the habit, and even to these it belongs not always and with respect to all things, for it depends upon God's will to help them.

14. But it must be known that those whose spirits are purged can learn by natural means with great readiness, and some more readily than others, that which is in the inward spirit or heart, and the inclinations and talents of men, and this by outward indications, albeit very slight ones, as words, movements and other signs. For, even as the devil can do this, since he is spirit, even so likewise can the spiritual man, according to the words of the Apostle, who says: *Spiritualis autem judicat omnia.*<sup>446</sup> 'He that is spiritual judgeth all things.' And again he says: *Spiritus enim omnia scrutatur, etiam profunda Dei.*<sup>447</sup> 'The spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.' Wherefore, although spiritual persons cannot by nature know thoughts, or things that are in the minds of others,<sup>448</sup> they may well interpret them through supernatural enlightenment or by signs. And, although they may often be deceived in their interpretation of signs, they are more generally correct. Yet we must trust neither to the one means nor to the other, for the devil meddles herein greatly, and with much subtlety, as we shall afterwards say, and thus we must ever renounce such kinds of knowledge.

15. And that spiritual persons may have knowledge of the deeds and happenings of men, even though they be elsewhere, we have witness and example in the Fourth Book of the Kings, where Giezi, the servant of our father Eliseus, desired to hide from him the money which he had received from Naaman the Syrian, and Eliseus said: *Nonne cor meum in praesenti erat, quando reversus est homo de curru suo in occursum tui?*<sup>449</sup> 'Was not my heart perchance present, when Naaman turned back

---

<sup>443</sup>[*Lit.*, 'exposition of words'; the reference is clearly to 1 Corinthians xii, 8-10.]

<sup>444</sup>[The original has *gratis datas*.]

<sup>445</sup>Proverbs xxvii, 19.

<sup>446</sup>1 Corinthians ii, 15.

<sup>447</sup>1 Corinthians ii, 10.

<sup>448</sup>[*Lit.*, 'in the interior.']

<sup>449</sup>4 Kings [A.V., 2 Kings] v, 26.

from his chariot and went to meet thee? This happens spiritually; the spirit sees it as though it were happening in its presence. And the same thing is proved in the same book, where we read likewise of the same Eliseus, that, knowing all that the King of Syria did with his princes in his privy chamber, he told it to the King of Israel, and thus the counsels of the King of Syria were of no effect; so much so that, when the King of Syria saw that all was known, he said to his people: Why do ye not tell me which of you is betraying me to the King of Israel? And then one of his servants said: *Nequaquam, Domine mi Rex, sed Eliseus Propheta, qui est in Israel, indicat Regi Israel omnia verba, quaecumque locutus fueris in conclavi tuo.*<sup>450</sup> 'It is not so, my lord, O King, but Eliseus, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel all the words that thou speakest in thy privy chamber.'

16. Both kinds of this knowledge of things, as well as other kinds of knowledge, come to pass in the soul passively, so that for its own part it does naught. For it will come to pass that, when a person is inattentive to a matter and it is far from his mind, there will come to him a vivid understanding of what he is hearing or reading, and that much more clearly than could be conveyed by the sound of the words; and at times, though he understand not the words, as when they are in Latin and he knows not that tongue, the knowledge of their meaning comes to him, despite his not understanding them.

17. With regard to the deceptions which the devil can bring about, and does bring about, concerning this kind of knowledge and understanding, there is much that might be said, for the deceptions which he effects in this way are very great and very difficult to unmask. Inasmuch as, through suggestion, he can represent to the soul many kinds of intellectual knowledge and implant them so firmly that it appears impossible that they should not be true, he will certainly cause the soul to believe innumerable falsehoods if it be not humble and cautious. For suggestion has sometimes great power over the soul, above all when it is to some extent aided by the weakness of sense, causing the knowledge which it conveys to sink into the soul with such great power, persuasiveness and determination that the soul needs to give itself earnestly to prayer and to exert great strength if it is to cast it off. For at times the devil is accustomed to represent to the soul the sins of others, and evil consciences and evil souls, falsely but very vividly, and all this he does to harm the soul, trusting that it may spread abroad his revelations, and that thus more sins may be committed, for which reason he fills the soul with zeal by making it believe that these revelations are granted it so that it may commend the persons concerned to God. Now, though it is true that God sometimes sets before holy souls the necessities of their neighbours, so that they may commend them to God or relieve them, even as we read that He revealed to Jeremias the weakness of the prophet Baruch, that he might give him counsel concerning it,<sup>451</sup> yet it is more often the devil who does this, and speaks falsely about it, in order to cause infamy, sin and discouragement, whereof we have very great experience. And at other times he implants other kinds of knowledge with great assurance, and persuades the soul to believe them.

18. Such knowledge as this, whether it be of God or no, can be of very little assistance to the progress of the soul on its journey to God if the soul desire it and be attached to it; on the contrary, if it were not scrupulous in rejecting it, not only would it

---

<sup>450</sup>4 Kings [A.V., 2 Kings] vi, 12.

<sup>451</sup>Jeremias xlv, 3.

be hindered on its road, but it would even be greatly harmed and led far astray. For all the perils and inconveniences which, as we have said, may be involved in the supernatural apprehensions whereof we have treated up to this point, may occur here, and more also. I will not, therefore, treat more fully of this matter here, since sufficient instruction about it has already been given in past chapters; I will only say that the soul must always be very scrupulous in rejecting these things, and seek to journey to God by the way of unknowing; and must ever relate its experiences to its spiritual confessor, and be ever attentive to his counsel. Let the confessor guide the soul past this, laying no stress upon it, for it is of no kind of importance for the road to union; for when these things are granted to the soul passively they always leave in it such effect as God wills shall remain, without necessity for the soul to exert any diligence in the matter. And thus it seems to me that there is no reason to describe here either the effect which is produced by true knowledge, or that which comes from false knowledge, for this would be wearisome and never-ending. For the effects of this knowledge cannot all be described in a brief instruction, the knowledge being great and greatly varied, and its effects being so likewise, since good knowledge produces good effects, and evil knowledge, evil effects, etc. In saying that all should be rejected, we have said sufficient for the soul not to go astray.

## CHAPTER XXVII

*Which treats of the second kind of revelation, namely, the disclosure of hidden secrets. Describes the way in which these may assist the soul toward union with God, and the way in which they may be a hindrance; and how the devil may deceive the soul greatly in this matter.*

WE were saying that the second kind of revelation was the manifestation of hidden mysteries and secrets. This may come to pass in two ways. The first with respect to that which God is in Himself, wherein is included the revelation of the mystery of the Most Holy Trinity and Unity of God. The second is with respect to that which God is in His works, and herein are included the other articles of our Catholic faith, and the propositions deducible from them which may be laid down explicitly as truths. In these are included and comprised a great number of the revelations of the prophets, of promises and threatenings of God, and of other things which have happened and shall happen concerning this matter of faith. Under this second head we may also include many other particular things which God habitually reveals, both concerning the universe in general as also in particular concerning kingdoms, provinces and states and families and particular persons. Of these we have examples in abundance in the Divine writings, both of the one kind and of the other, especially in all the Prophets, wherein are found revelations of all these kinds. As this is a clear and plain matter, I will not here spend time in quoting these examples, but will only say that these revelations do not come to pass by word alone, but that God gives them in many ways and manners, sometimes by word alone, sometimes by signs and figures alone, and by images and similitudes alone, sometimes in more than one way at once, as is likewise to be seen in the Prophets, particularly throughout the Apocalypse, where we find not only all the kinds of revelation which we have described, but likewise the ways and manners to which we are here referring.

2. As to these revelations which are included under our second head, God grants them still in our time to whom He will. He is wont, for example, to reveal to some persons how many days they still have to live, or what trials they are to suffer, or what is to befall such and such a person, or such and such a kingdom, etc. And even as regards the mysteries of our faith, He will reveal and expound to the spirit the truths concerning them, although, since this has already been revealed once, it is not properly to be termed revelation, but is more correctly a manifestation or explanation of what has been revealed already.

3. In this kind of revelation the devil may meddle freely. For, as revelations of this nature come ordinarily through words, figures and similitudes, etc., the devil may very readily counterfeit others like them, much more so than when the revelations are in spirit alone. Wherefore, if with regard to the first and the second kind of revelation which we are here describing, as touching our faith, there be revealed to us anything new, or different, we must in no wise give our consent to it, even though we had evidence that it was spoken by an angel from Heaven. For even so says Saint Paul, in these words: *Licet nos, gut Angelus de coelo evangelizet vobis praeterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis, anathema sit.*<sup>452</sup> Which signifies: Even though an angel from Heaven declare or preach unto you aught else than that which we have preached unto you, let him be anathema.

4. Since, then, there are no more articles to be revealed concerning the substance of our faith than those which have already been revealed to the Church, not only must anything new which may be revealed to the soul concerning this be rejected, but it behoves the soul to be cautious and pay no heed to any novelties implied therein, and for the sake of the purity of the soul it behoves it to rely on faith alone. Even though the truths already revealed to it be revealed again, it will believe them, not because they are now revealed anew, but because they have already been sufficiently revealed to the Church: indeed, it must close its understanding to them, holding simply to the doctrine of the Church and to its faith, which, as Saint Paul says, enters through hearing.<sup>453</sup> And let not its credence and intellectual assent be given to these matters of the faith which have been revealed anew, however fitting and true they may seem to it, if it desire not to be deceived. For, in order to deceive the soul and to instil falsehoods into it, the devil first feeds it with truths and things that are probable in order to give it assurance and afterwards to deceive it. He resembles one that sews leather with a bristle, first piercing the leather with the sharp bristle, after which enters the soft thread; the thread could not enter unless the bristle guided it.

5. And let this be considered carefully; for, even were it true that there was no peril in such deception, yet it greatly behoves the soul not to desire to understand clearly things that have respect to the faith, so that it may preserve the merit of faith, in its purity and entirety, and likewise that it may come, in this night of the understanding, to the Divine light of Divine union. And it is equally necessary to consider any new revelation with ones eyes closed, and holding fast the prophecies of old, for the Apostle Saint Peter, though he had seen the glory of the Son of God after some manner on Mount Tabor, wrote, in his canonical epistle, these words: *Et habemus firmiorem propheticum sermonem; cui bene factitis attendentes, etc.*<sup>454</sup> Which is as though he had

---

<sup>452</sup>Galatians i, 8.

<sup>453</sup>Romans x, 17.

<sup>454</sup>2 St. Peter i, 19.

said: Although the vision that we have seen of Christ on the Mount is true, the word of the prophecy that is revealed to us is firmer and surer, and, if ye rest your soul upon it, ye do well.

6. And if it is true that, for the reasons already described, it behoves the soul to close its eyes to the aforementioned revelations which come to it, and which concern the propositions of the faith, how much more necessary will it be neither to receive nor to give credit to other revelations relating to different things, wherein the devil habitually meddles so freely that I believe it impossible for a man not to be deceived in many of them unless he strive to reject them, such an appearance of truth and security does the devil give them? For he brings together so many appearances and probabilities, in order that they may be believed, and plants them so firmly in the sense and the imagination, that it seems to the person affected that what he says will certainly happen; and in such a way does he cause the soul to grasp and hold them, that, if it have not humility, it will hardly be persuaded to reject them and made to believe the contrary. Wherefore, the soul that is pure, cautious, simple and humble must resist revelations and other visions with as much effort and care as though they were very perilous temptations. For there is no need to desire them; on the contrary, there is need not too desire them, if we are to reach the union of love. It is this that Solomon meant when he said: 'What need has a man to desire and seek things that are above his natural capacity?'<sup>455</sup> As though we were to say: He has no necessity, in order to be perfect, to desire supernatural things by supernatural means, which are above his capacity.

7. And as the objections that can be made to this have already been answered, in the nineteenth and twentieth chapter of this book, I refer the reader to these, saying only that the soul must keep itself from all revelations in order to journey, in purity and without error, in the night of faith, to union.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

*Which treats of interior locutions that may come to the spirit supernaturally. Says of what kinds they are.*

THE discreet reader has ever need to bear in mind the intent and end which I have in this book, which is the direction of the soul, through all its apprehensions, natural and supernatural, without deception or hindrance, in purity of faith, to Divine union with God. If he does this, he will understand that, although with respect to apprehensions of the soul and the doctrine that I am expounding I give not such copious instruction neither do I particularize so much or make so many divisions as the understanding perchance requires, I am not being over-brief in this matter. For with respect to all this I believe that sufficient cautions, explanations and instructions are given for the soul to be enabled to behave prudently in every contingency, outward or inward, so as to make progress. And this is the reason why I have so briefly dismissed the subject of prophetic apprehensions and the other subjects allied to it; for there is so much more to be said of each of them, according to the differences and the ways and manners that are wont to be observed in each, that I believe one could never know it all perfectly. I am content that, as I believe, the substance and the doctrine thereof have been given, and the soul

---

<sup>455</sup>Ecclesiastes vii, 1.



has been warned of the caution which it behoves it to exercise in this respect, and also concerning all other things of the same kind that may come to pass within it.

2. I will now follow the same course with regard to the third kind of apprehension, which, we said, was that of supernatural locutions, which are apt to come to the spirits of spiritual persons without the intervention of any bodily sense. These, although they are of many kinds, may, I believe, all be reduced to three, namely: successive, formal and substantial. I describe as successive certain words and arguments which the spirit is wont to form and fashion when it is inwardly recollected. Formal words are certain clear and distinct words<sup>456</sup> which the spirit receives, not from itself, but from a third person, sometimes when it is recollected and sometimes when it is not. Substantial words are others which also come to the spirit formally, sometimes when it is recollected and sometimes when it is not; these cause in the substance of the soul that substance and virtue which they signify. All these we shall here proceed to treat in their order.

## CHAPTER XXIX

*Which treats of the first kind of words that the recollected spirit sometimes forms within itself. Describes the cause of these and the profit and the harm which there may be in them.*

These successive words always come when the spirit is recollected and absorbed very attentively in some meditation; and, in its reflections upon that same matter whereon it is thinking, it proceeds from one stage to another, forming words and arguments which are very much to the point, with great facility and distinctiveness, and by means of its reasoning discovers things which it knew not with respect to the subject of its reflections, so that it seems not to be doing this itself, but rather it seems that another person is supplying the reasoning within its mind or answering its questions or teaching it. And in truth it has good cause for thinking this, for the soul itself is reasoning with itself and answering itself as though it were two persons convening together; and in some ways this is really so; for, although it is the spirit itself that works as an instrument, the Holy Spirit oftentimes aids it to produce and form those true reasonings, words and conceptions. And thus it utters them to itself as though to a third person. For, as at that time the understanding is recollected and united with the truth of that whereon it is thinking, and the Divine Spirit is likewise united with it in that truth, as it is always united in all truth, it follows that, when the understanding communicates in this way with the Divine Spirit by means of this truth, it begins to form within itself, successively, those other truths which are connected with that whereon it is thinking, the door being opened to it and illumination being given to it continually by the Holy Spirit Who teaches it. For this is one of the ways wherein the Holy Spirit teaches.

2. And when the understanding is illumined and taught in this way by this master, and comprehends these truths, it begins of its own accord to form the words which relate to the truths that are communicated to it from elsewhere. So that we may say that the voice is the voice of Jacob and the hands are the hand of Esau.<sup>457</sup> And one that is

---

<sup>456</sup>[*Lit.*, 'certain distinct and formal words.']

<sup>457</sup>Genesis xxvii, 22.

in this condition will be unable to believe that this is so, but will think that the sayings and the words come from a third person. For such a one knows not the facility with which the understanding can form words inwardly, as though they came from a third person, and having reference to conceptions and truths which have in fact been communicated to it by a third person.

3. And although it is true that, in this communication and enlightenment of the understanding, no deception is produced in the soul itself, nevertheless, deception may, and does, frequently occur in the formal words and reasonings which the understanding bases upon it. For, inasmuch as this illumination which it receives is at times very subtle and spiritual, so that the understanding cannot attain to a clear apprehension of it, and it is the understanding that, as we say, forms the reasonings of its own accord, it follows that those which it forms are frequently false, and on other occasions are only apparently true, or are imperfect. For since at the outset the soul began to seize the truth, and then brought into play the skilfulness or the clumsiness of its own weak understanding, its perception of the truth may easily be modified by the instability of its own faculties of comprehension, and act all the time exactly as though a third person were speaking.

4. I knew a person who had these successive locutions: among them were some very true and substantial ones concerning the most holy Sacrament of the Eucharist, but others were sheer heresy. And I am appalled at what happens in these days -- namely, when some soul with the very smallest experience<sup>458</sup> of meditation, if it be conscious of certain locutions of this kind in some state of recollection, at once christens them all as coming from God, and assumes that this is the case, saying: 'God said to me . . .'; 'God answered me . . .'; whereas it is not so at all, but, as we have said, it is for the most part they who are saying these things to themselves.

5. And, over and above this, the desire which people have for locutions, and the pleasure which comes to their spirits from them, lead them to make answer to themselves and then to think that it is God Who is answering them and speaking to them. They therefore commit great blunders unless they impose a strict restraint upon themselves, and unless their director obliges them to abstain from these kinds of reflection. For they are apt to gain from them mere nonsensical talk and impurity of soul rather than humility and mortification of spirit, if they think, 'This was indeed a great thing' and 'God was speaking'; whereas it will have been little more than nothing, or nothing at all, or less than nothing. For, if humility and charity be not engendered by such experiences, and mortification and holy simplicity and silence, etc., what can be the value of them? I say, then, that these things may hinder the soul greatly in its progress to Divine union because, if it pay heed to them, it is led far astray from the abyss of faith, where the understanding must remain in darkness, and must journey in darkness, by love and in faith, and not by much reasoning.

6. And if you ask me why the understanding must be deprived of these truths, since through them it is illumined by the Spirit of God, and thus they<sup>459</sup> cannot be evil, I reply that the Holy Spirit illumines the understanding which is recollected, and illumines it according to the manner of its recollection,<sup>460</sup> and that the understanding cannot find

---

<sup>458</sup>[*Lit.*, 'with four maraved's' worth of experience.' The *maraved*' was a small coin, worth 1/375 of a gold ducat, the unit of coinage at this time in Castile.]

<sup>459</sup>[*Lit.*, 'and thus it.']

<sup>460</sup>This profound and important principle, which has often been developed in mystical theology, is well

any other and greater recollection than in faith; and thus the Holy Spirit will illumine it in naught more than in faith. For the purer and the more refined in faith is the soul, the more it has of the infused charity of God; and the more charity it has, the more is it illumined and the more gifts of the Holy Spirit are communicated to it, for charity is the cause and the means whereby they are communicated to it. And although it is true that, in this illumination of truths, the Holy Spirit communicates a certain light to the soul, this is nevertheless as different in quality from that which is in faith, wherein is no clear understanding, as is the most precious gold from the basest metal; and, with regard to its quantity, the one is as much greater than the other as the sea is greater than a drop of water. For in the one manner there is communicated to the soul wisdom concerning one or two or three truths, etc., but in the other there is communicated to it all the wisdom of God in general, which is the Son of God, Who communicates Himself to the soul in faith.

7. And if you tell me that this is all good, and that the one impedes not the other, I reply that it impedes it greatly if the soul sets store by it; for to do this is to occupy itself with things which are clear and of little importance, yet which are sufficient to hinder the communication of the abyss of faith, wherein God supernaturally and secretly instructs the soul, and exalts it in virtues and gifts in a way that it knows not. And the profit which these successive communications will bring us cannot come by our deliberately applying the understanding to them, for if we do this they will rather lead us astray, even as Wisdom says to the soul in the Songs: 'Turn away thine eyes from me, for they make me to fly away.'<sup>461</sup> That is so say: They make me to fly far away from thee and to set myself higher. We must therefore not apply the understanding to that which is being supernaturally communicated to it, but simply and sincerely apply the will to God with love, for it is through love that these good things are communicated and through love they will be communicated in greater abundance than before. For if the ability of the natural understanding or of other faculties be brought actively to bear upon these things which are communicated supernaturally and passively, its imperfect nature will not reach them, and thus they will perforce be modified according to the capacity of the understanding, and consequently will perforce be changed; and thus the understanding will necessarily go astray and begin to form reasonings within itself, and there will no longer be anything supernatural or any semblance thereof, but all will be merely natural and most erroneous and unworthy.

8. But there are certain types of understanding so quick and subtle that, when they become recollected during some meditation, they invent conceptions, and begin naturally, and with great facility, to form these conceptions into the most lifelike words and arguments, which they think, without any doubt, come from God. Yet all the time they come only from the understanding, which, with its natural illumination, being to some extent freed from the operation of the senses, is able to effect all this, and more, without any supernatural aid. This happens very commonly, and many persons are greatly deceived by it, thinking that they have attained to a high degree of prayer and

---

expounded by P. JosŽ de Jescœs Mar'a in a treatise called *Reply to a question* [*Respuesta a una duda*]. Here, among other things, he says: 'As St. Thomas proves (*De Veritate*, q. 12, a. 6), Divine illumination, like every other spiritual form, is communicated to the soul after the manner of the receiver of it, whether according to sense or according to spirit, to the particular or to the universal. And thus, he that receives it must prepare himself for it to be communicated to him further, whether in small measure (as we say) or according to sense, or in large measure or intellectually.'

<sup>461</sup>[Canticles vi, 4.]

are receiving communications from God, wherefore they either write this down or cause it to be written. And it turns out to be nothing, and to have the substance of no virtue, and it serves only to encourage them in vanity.

9. Let these persons learn to be intent upon naught, save only upon grounding the will in humble love, working diligently, suffering and thus imitating the Son of God in His life and mortifications, for it is by this road that a man will come to all spiritual good, rather than by much inward reasoning.

10. In this type of locution -- namely, in successive interior words -- the devil frequently intervenes, especially in the case of such as have some inclination or affection for them. At times when such persons begin to be recollected, the devil is accustomed to offer them ample material for distractions, forming conceptions or words by suggestion in their understanding, and then corrupting<sup>462</sup> and deceiving it most subtly with things that have every appearance of being true. And this is one of the manners wherein he communicates with those who have made some implicit or expressed compact with him; as with certain heretics, especially with certain heresiarchs, whose understanding he fills with most subtle, false and erroneous conceptions and arguments.

11. From what has been said, it is evident that these successive locutions may proceed in the understanding from three causes, namely: from the Divine Spirit, Who moves and illumines the understanding; from the natural illumination of the same understanding; and from the devil, who may speak to the soul by suggestion. To describe now the signs and indications by which a man may know when they proceed from one cause and when from another would be somewhat difficult, as also to give examples and indications. It is quite possible, however, to give some general signs, which are these. When in its words and conceptions the soul finds itself loving God, and at the same time is conscious not only of love but also of humility and reverence, it is a sign that the Holy Spirit is working within it, for, whensoever He grants favours, He grants them with this accompaniment.<sup>463</sup> When the locutions proceed solely from the vivacity and brilliance of the understanding, it is the understanding that accomplishes everything, without the operation of the virtues (although the will, in the knowledge and illumination of those truths, may love naturally); and, when the meditation is over, the will remains dry, albeit inclined neither to vanity nor to evil, unless the devil should tempt it afresh about this matter. This, however, is not the case when the locutions have been prompted by a good spirit; for then, as a rule, the will is afterwards affectioned to God and inclined to well-doing. At certain times, nevertheless, it will happen that, although the communication has been the work of a good spirit, the will remains in aridity, since God ordains it so for certain causes which are of assistance to the soul. At other times the soul will not be very conscious of the operations or motions of those virtues, yet that which it has experienced will be good. Wherefore I say that the difference between these locutions is sometimes difficult to recognize, by reason of the varied effects which they produce; but these which have now been described are the most common, although sometimes they occur in greater abundance and sometimes in less. But those that come from the devil are sometimes difficult to understand and recognize, for, although it is true that as a rule they leave the will in aridity with respect to love of God, and the mind inclined to vanity, self-esteem or complacency, nevertheless they

---

<sup>462</sup>[*Lit.*, 'and then throwing it down.']

<sup>463</sup>[*Lit.*, 'He grants them wrapped up in this.']

sometimes inspire the soul with a false humility and a fervent affection of the will rooted in self-love, so that at times a person must be extremely spiritually-minded to recognize it. And this the devil does in order the better to protect himself; for he knows very well how sometimes to produce tears by the feelings which he inspires in a soul, in order that he may continue to implant in it the affections that he desires. But he always strives to move its will so that it may esteem those interior communications, attach great importance to them, and, as a result, give itself up to them and be occupied in that which is not virtue, but is rather the occasion of losing virtue as the soul may have.

12. Let us remember, then, this necessary caution, both as to the one type of locution and as to the other, so that we may not be deceived or hindered by them. Let us treasure none of them, but think only of learning to direct our will determinedly to God, fulfilling His law and His holy counsels perfectly, which is the wisdom of the Saints, and contenting ourselves with knowing the mysteries and truths

with the simplicity and truth wherewith the Church sets them before us. For this is sufficient to enkindle the will greatly, so that we need not pry into other deep and curious things wherein it is a wonder if there is no peril. For with respect to this Saint Paul says: It is not fitting to know more than it behoves us<sup>464</sup> to know.<sup>465</sup> And let this suffice with respect to this matter of successive words.

## CHAPTER XXX

*Which treats of the interior words that come to the spirit formally by supernatural means. Warns the reader of the harm which they may do and of the caution that is necessary in order that the soul may not be deceived by them.*

THE interior words belonging to the second type are formal words, which at certain times come to the spirit by supernatural means, without the intervention of any of the senses, sometimes when the spirit is recollected and at other times when it is not. I call them formal because they are communicated to the spirit formally by a third person, the spirit itself playing no part in this. And they are therefore very different from those which we have just described; because not only is there this difference, that they come without any such intervention of the spirit itself as takes place in the other case; but also, as I say, they sometimes come when the spirit is not recollected and even when it is far from thinking of the subject of what is being said to it. This is not so in the first type of locution -- namely, that of successive words -- which always has some relation to the subject which the soul is considering.

2. These words are sometimes very clearly formed and sometimes less so; for they are frequently like conceptions in which something is said to the spirit, whether in the form of a reply to it or in that of another manner of address. Sometimes there is only one word; sometimes there are two or more; sometimes the words succeed one another like those already described, for they are apt to be continuous, either instructing the soul or discussing something with it; and all this comes to pass without any part being played therein by the spirit, for it is just as though one person were speaking with another. In this way, we read, it came to pass with Daniel, who says that the angel spoke within

---

<sup>464</sup>[The verbs used in the Spanish for 'is fitting' and 'behooves' are the same.]

<sup>465</sup>Romans xii, 3.

him.<sup>466</sup> This was a formal and successive discourse within his spirit, which instructed him, even as the angel declared at the time, saying that he had come to instruct him.

3. When these words are no more than formal, the effect which they produce upon the soul is not great. For ordinarily they serve only to instruct or illumine with respect to one thing; and, in order to produce this effect, it is not necessary that they should produce any other effect more efficacious than the purpose to which they are leading. And when they are of God they invariably work this in the soul; for they make it ready and quick to do that which it is commanded or instructed to do; yet at times they take not from it the repugnance or the difficulty which it feels, but are rather wont to increase these, according as God ordains for the better instruction, increased humility and greater good of the soul. And this repugnance most commonly occurs when the soul is commanded to do things of a high order, or things of a kind that may exalt it; when things are commanded it that conduce to its greater lowliness and humility, it responds with more readiness and ease. And thus we read in Exodus that, when God commanded Moses to go to Pharaoh and drive the people, he showed such great repugnance that He had to command him three times to do it and to perform signs for him; and all this was of no avail until God gave him Aaron for a companion to take part of the honour.<sup>467</sup>

4. When, on the other hand, the words and communications are of the devil, it comes to pass that the soul responds with more ease and readiness to things that are of greater weight,<sup>468</sup> and for lowlier things it conceives repugnance. The fact is that God so greatly abhors seeing souls attracted by high position that, even when He commands and obliges them to accept such positions, He desires them not to be ready and anxious to command. It is this readiness which God commonly inspires in the soul, through these formal words, that constitutes one great difference between them and those other successive words: the latter move not the spirit so much, neither do they inspire it with such readiness, since they are less formal, and since the understanding has more to do with them. Nevertheless successive words may sometimes produce a greater effect by reason of the close communication that there is at times between the Divine Spirit and the human. It is in the manner of their coming that there is a great difference between the two kinds of locution. With respect to formal words the soul can have no doubt as to whether or no it is pronouncing them itself, for it sees quite ready that it is not, especially when it has not been thinking of the subject of that which has been said to it; and even when it has been so thinking it feels very clearly and distinctly that the words come from elsewhere.

5. The soul must no more attach importance to all these formal words than to the other, or successive, words; for, apart from the fact that to do so would occupy the spirit with that which is not a legitimate and proximate means to union with God -- namely, faith -- it might also very easily cause it to be deceived by the devil. For sometimes it is hardly possible to know what words are spoken by a good spirit, and what by an evil spirit. By their effects they can hardly be distinguished at all, since neither kind produces effects of much importance: sometimes, indeed, with imperfect souls, words which come from the devil have more efficacy than have these others, which come from a good spirit, with souls that are spiritual. The soul, then, must take no account of what

---

<sup>466</sup>Daniel ix, 22.

<sup>467</sup>Exodus iii, iv.

<sup>468</sup>[*Lit.*, 'greater worth.']

these words may express, nor attach any importance to them, whether the spirit from which they come be good or evil. But the words must be repeated to an experienced confessor, or to a discreet and learned person, that he may give instruction and see what it is well to do, and impart his advice; and the soul must behave, with regard to them, in a resigned and negative way. And, if such an expert person cannot be found, it is better to attach no importance to these words and to repeat them to nobody; for it is easy to find persons who will ruin the soul rather than edify it. Souls must not be given into the charge of any kind of director, since in so grave a matter it is of the greatest importance whether one goes astray or acts rightly.

6. And let it be carefully noted that a soul should never act according to its own opinion or accept anything of what these locutions express, without much reflection and without taking advice of another. For strange and subtle deceptions may arise in this matter; so much so that I myself believe that the soul that does not set itself against accepting such things cannot fail to be deceived by many of them.

7. And since we have treated of these deceptions and perils, and of the caution to be observed with regard to them, in Chapters seventeen, eighteen, nineteen and twenty of this book, I refer the reader to these and say no more on this matter here; I only repeat that my chief instruction is that the soul should attach no importance to these things in any way.

## CHAPTER XXXI

*Which treats of the substantial words that come interiorly to the spirit. Describes the difference between them and formal words, and the profit which they bring and the resignation and respect which the soul must observe with regard to them.*<sup>469</sup>

THE third kind of interior words, we said, is called substantial. These substantial words, although they are likewise formal, since they are impressed upon the soul in a definitely formal way, differ, nevertheless, in that substantial words produce vivid and substantial effects upon the soul, whereas words which are merely formal do not. So that, although it is true that every substantial word is formal, every formal word is not therefore substantial, but only, as we said above, such a word as impresses substantially on the soul that which it signifies. It is as if Our Lord were to say formally to the soul: 'Be thou good'; it would then be substantially good. Or as if He were to say to it: 'Love thou Me'; it would then have and feel within itself the substance of love for God. Or as if it feared greatly and He said to it: 'Fear thou not'; it would at once feel within itself great fortitude and tranquility. For the saying of God, and His word, as the Wise Man says, is full of

---

<sup>469</sup>This chapter is notable for the hardly surpassable clarity and precisions with which the Saint defines substantial locutions. Some critics, however, have found fault with him for saying that the soul should not fear these locutions, but accept them humbly and passively, since they depend wholly on God. The reply is that, when God favours the soul with these locutions, its own restless effort can only impede His work in it, as has already been said. The soul is truly co-operating with God by preparing itself with resignation and humble affection to receive His favours: it should not, as some critics have asserted, remain completely inactive. As to the fear of being deceived by these locutions, both St. Thomas and all the principal commentators are in conformity with the Saint's teaching. St. Teresa, too, took the same attitude as St. John of the Cross. Cf. her *Life*, Chap. xxv, and *Interior Castle*, VI, iii.

power;<sup>470</sup> and thus that which He says to the soul He produces substantially within it. For it is this that David meant when he said: 'See, He will give to His voice a voice of virtue.'<sup>471</sup> And even so with Abraham, when He said to him: 'Walk in My presence and be perfect':<sup>472</sup> he was then perfect and walked ever in the fear of God. And this is the power of His word in the Gospel, wherewith He healed the sick, raised the dead, etc., by no more than a word. And after this manner He gives certain souls locutions which are substantial; and they are of such moment and price that they are life and virtue and incomparable good to the soul; for one of these words works greater good within the soul than all that the soul itself has done throughout its life.

2. With respect to these words, the soul should do nothing. It should neither desire them nor refrain from desiring them; it should neither reject them nor fear them. It should do nothing in the way of executing what these words express, for these substantial words are never pronounced by God in order that the soul may translate them into action, but that He may so translate them within the soul; herein they differ from formal and successive words. And I say that the soul must neither desire nor refrain from desiring, since its desire is not necessary for God to translate these words into effect, nor is it sufficient for the soul to refrain from desiring in order for the said effect not to be produced. Let the soul rather be resigned and humble with respect to them. It must not reject them, since the effect of these words remains substantially within it and is full of the good which comes from God. As the soul receives this good passively, its action is at no time of any importance. Nor should it fear any deception; for neither the understanding nor the devil can intervene herein, nor can they succeed in passively producing this substantial effect in the soul, in such a way that the effect and habit of the locution may be impressed upon it, unless the soul should have given itself to the devil by a voluntary compact, and he should have dwelt in it as its master, and impressed upon it these effects, not of good, but of evil. Inasmuch as that soul would be already voluntarily united to him in perversity, the devil might easily impress upon it the effects of his sayings and words with evil intent. For we see by experience that in many things and even upon good souls he works great violence, by means of suggestion, making his suggestions very efficacious; and if they were evil he might work in them the consummation of these suggestions. But he cannot leave upon a soul effects similar to those of locutions which are good; for there is no comparison between the locutions of the devil and those of God. The former are all as though they were not, in comparison with the latter, neither do they produce any effect at all compared with the effect of these. For this cause God says through Jeremias: 'What has the chaff to do with the wheat? Are not My words perchance as fire, and as a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?'<sup>473</sup> And thus these substantial words are greatly conducive to the union of the soul with God; and the more interior they are, the more substantial are they, and the greater is the profit that they bring. Happy is the soul to whom God addresses these words. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.<sup>474</sup>

---

<sup>470</sup>Ecclesiastes viii, 4.

<sup>471</sup>Psalm lxvii, 34 [A.V., lxxviii, 33].

<sup>472</sup>Genesis xvii, 1.

<sup>473</sup>Jeremias xxiii, 28-9.

<sup>474</sup>1 Kings [A.V., 1 Samuel] iii, 10.



## CHAPTER XXXII

*Which treats of the apprehensions received by the understanding from interior feelings which come supernaturally to the soul. Describes their cause, and the manner wherein the soul must conduct itself so that they may not obstruct its road to union with God.*

IT is now time to treat of the fourth and last kind of intellectual apprehension which we said might come to the understanding through the spiritual feelings which are frequently produced supernaturally in the souls of spiritual persons and which we count amongst the distinct apprehensions of the understanding.

2. These distinct spiritual feelings may be of two kinds. The first kind is in the affection of the will. The second, in the substance of the soul. Each of these may be of many kinds. Those of the will, when they are of God, are most sublime; but those that are of the substance of the soul are very high and of great good and profit. As to these, neither the soul nor he that treats with it can know or understand the cause whence they proceed, or what are the acts whereby God may grant it these favours; for they depend not upon any works performed by the soul, nor upon its meditations, although both these things are a good preparation for them: God grants these favours to whom He wills and for what reason He wills.<sup>475</sup> For it may come to pass that a person will have performed many good works, yet that He will not give him these touches of His favour; and another will have done far fewer good works, yet He will give him them to a most sublime degree and in great abundance. And thus it is not needful that the soul should be actually employed and occupied in spiritual things (although it is much better that it should be so employed if it is to have these favours) for God to give it these touches in which the soul experiences the said feelings; for in the majority of cases the soul is completely heedless of them. Of these touches, some are distinct and pass quickly away; others are less distinct and last longer.

3. These feelings, inasmuch as they are feelings only, belong not to the understanding but to the will; and thus I refrain, of set purpose, from treating of them here, nor shall I do so until we treat of the night and purgation of the will in its affections: this will be in the third book, which follows this.<sup>476</sup> But since frequently, and even in the majority of cases, apprehensions and knowledge and intelligence overflow from them into the understanding, it would be well to make mention of them here, for that reason only. It must be known, then, that from these feelings, both from those of the will and from those which are in the substance of the soul, whether they are caused suddenly by the touches of God, or are durable and successive, an apprehension of knowledge or intelligence frequently overflows, as I say, into the understanding; and this is normally a most sublime perception of God, most delectable to the understanding, to which no name can be given, any more than to the feeling whence it overflows. And these manifestations of knowledge are sometimes of one kind and sometimes of another; sometimes they are clearer and more sublime, according to the nature of the touches which come from God and which produce the feelings whence they proceed, and

---

<sup>475</sup>A, B: 'and how He wills.' Note that the Saint does not deprecate good works, as did the Illuminists [*alumbrados*], who bade the perfect soul set them aside for contemplation, even though they were works of obligation. On the contrary, he asserts that good works have a definite, though a preparatory, part to play in the life of a contemplative.

<sup>476</sup>Alc. alone has: 'which follows this.' The Saint does not, in fact, return to this matter, either in the third book or elsewhere.

according also to their individual characteristics.

4. It is unnecessary here to spend a great store of words in cautioning and directing the understanding, through these manifestations of knowledge, in faith, to union with God. For albeit the feelings which we have described are produced passively in the soul, without any effective assistance to that end on its own part, even so likewise is the knowledge of them received passively in the understanding, in a way called by the philosophers 'passible,' wherein the understanding plays no part. Wherefore, in order not to go astray on their account nor to impede the profit which comes from them, the understanding must do nothing in connection with these feelings, but must conduct itself passively, and not interfere by applying to them its natural capacity. For, as we have said is the case with successive locutions, the understanding, with its activity, would very easily disturb and ruin the effect of these delicate manifestations of knowledge, which are a delectable supernatural intelligence that human nature cannot attain or apprehend by its own efforts, but only by remaining in a state of receptivity.<sup>477</sup> And thus the soul must not strive to attain them or desire to receive them, lest the understanding should form other manifestations of its own, or the devil should make his entry with still more that are different from them and false. This he may very well do by means of the feelings aforementioned, or of those which he can himself infuse into the soul that devotes itself to these kinds of knowledge. Let the soul be resigned, humble and passive herein, for, since it receives this knowledge passively from God, He will communicate it whensoever He is pleased, if He sees the soul to be humble and detached. And in this way the soul will do nothing to counteract the help which these kinds of knowledge give it in its progress toward Divine union, which help is great; for these touches are all touches of union, which is wrought passively in the soul.<sup>478</sup>

5. What has been said concerning this suffices, for no matter what may happen to the soul with respect to the understanding, cautions and instructions have been given it in the sections already mentioned. And although a case may appear to be different and to be in no way included herein, there is none that cannot be referred to one of these, and thus may be deduced the instruction necessary for it.<sup>479</sup>

---

<sup>477</sup>[*Lit.*, 'or apprehend by doing, but by receiving.']

<sup>478</sup>Some editions here add a long paragraph, which, however, is the work of P. Jerónimo de San Josė, who was responsible for the edition of 1630. It appears neither in the MSS. nor in e.p. It runs as follows:

All the instruction which has been given in this book on total abstraction and passive contemplation, wherein, oblivious to all created things and detached from images and figures, we allow ourselves to be guided by God, dwelling with simple regard upon supreme truth, is applicable not only to that act of most perfect contemplation, the lofty and wholly supernatural repose of which is still prevented by the daughters of Jerusalem (namely, good reflections and meditations), if at that time the soul desires them, but also to the whole of the time during which Our Lord communicates the simple, general and loving attentiveness aforementioned, or during which the soul, aided by grace, places itself in that state. For at that time the soul must always strive to keep its understanding in repose, without the interference of other forms, figures or particular kinds of knowledge, save very fleetingly and quite superficially; and it must have a loving sweetness which will enkindle it ever more. But, except at this time, in all its exercises, acts and works, the soul must make use of good meditations and remembrances, so as to experience the greater devotion and profit, most of all with respect to the life, passion and death of Our Lord Jesus Christ, so that its actions, practices and life may be made like to His.

<sup>479</sup>Thus Alc. A, B, e.p. read: 'This suffices to conclude (our treatment of) the supernatural apprehensions of the understanding, so far as concerns the guidance of the understanding, by their means, in faith, to Divine union. And I think that what has been said with regard to this suffices, for, no matter what happens to the soul with respect to the understanding, instructions and cautions concerning it will be found in the sections already mentioned. And, if something should happen, apparently so different that none of them

---

deals with it (although I think there will be nothing relating to the understanding which cannot be referred to one of the four kinds of distinct knowledge), instructions and cautions concerning it can be deduced from what has been said of others similar to it. And with this we will pass to the third book, where, with the Divine favour, we shall treat of the interior spiritual purgation of the will with regard to its interior affections which we here call active night.'

C, D have: 'From what has been said may be deduced instructions and cautions for guidance in whatever may happen to the soul with regard to the understanding, even if it seem so different that it includes none of the four distinct kinds, although I think there will be nothing relating to the understanding which cannot be referred to one of them. And so we will pass to the third book.'

The edition of 1630 follows A, B and e.p., and adds further: 'I therefore beg the discreet reader to read these things in a benevolent and simple spirit; for, when this spirit is not present, however sublime and perfect be the instruction, it will not yield the profit that it contains, nor will it earn the esteem that it merits. How much truer is this in the present case, since my style is in so many ways deficient!'

## BOOK THE THIRD

*Which treats of the purgation of the active night of the memory and will. Gives instruction how the soul is to behave with respect to the apprehensions of these two faculties, that it may come to union with God, according to the two faculties aforementioned, in perfect hope and charity.*

### CHAPTER I

THE first faculty of the soul, which is the understanding, has now been instructed, through all its apprehensions, in the first theological virtue, which is faith, to the end that, according to this faculty, the soul may be united with God by means of the purity of faith. It now remains to do likewise with respect to the other two faculties of the soul, which are memory and will, and to purify them likewise with respect to their apprehensions, to the end that, according to these two faculties also, the soul may come to union with God in perfect hope and charity. This will briefly be effected in this third book. We have now concluded our treatment of the understanding, which is the receptacle of all other objects according to its mode of operation; and in treating of this we have gone a great part of the whole way. It is therefore unnecessary for us to write at equal length with respect to these faculties; for it is not possible that, if the spiritual man instructs his understanding in faith according to the doctrine which has been given him, he should not, in so doing, instruct the other two faculties in the other two virtues likewise; for the operations of each faculty depend upon the others.

2. But since, in order to follow our manner of procedure, and in order, too, that we may be the better understood, we must necessarily speak of the proper and determinate matter, we shall here be obliged to set down the apprehensions proper to each faculty, and first, those of the memory, making here such distinction between them as suffices for our purpose. This we shall be able to deduce from the distinction between their objects, which are three: natural, imaginary and spiritual; according to which there are likewise three kinds of knowledge which come from the memory, namely: natural and supernatural,<sup>480</sup> imaginary and spiritual.

3. All these, by the Divine favour, we shall treat here in due course, beginning with natural knowledge, which pertains to the most exterior objects. And we shall then treat of the affections of the will, wherewith we shall conclude this third book of the active spiritual night.

### CHAPTER II

*Which treats of the natural apprehensions of the memory and describes how the soul must be voided of them in order to be able to attain to union with God according to this faculty.*

---

<sup>480</sup>It will be seen from what follows that in practice the Saint preserves the strictly tripartite division given in the text above, supernatural knowledge being found in each of the sections.

IT is necessary that, in each of these books, the reader should bear in mind the purpose of which we are speaking. For otherwise there may arise within him many such questions with respect to what he is reading as might by this time be occurring to him with respect to what we have said of the understanding, and shall say now of the memory, and afterwards shall say of the will. For, seeing how we annihilate the faculties with respect to their operations, it may perhaps seem to him that we are destroying the road of spiritual practice rather than constructing it.

2. This would be true if we were seeking here only to instruct beginners, who are best prepared through these apprehensible and discursive apprehensions. But, since we are here giving instruction to those who would progress farther in contemplation, even to union with God, to which end all of these means and exercises of sense concerning the faculties must recede into the background, and be put to silence, to the end that God may of His own accord work Divine union in the soul, it is necessary to proceed by this method of disencumbering and emptying the soul, and causing it to reject the natural jurisdiction and operations of the faculties, so that they may become capable of infusion and illumination from supernatural sources; for their capacity cannot attain to so lofty an experience, but will rather hinder it, if it be not disregarded.

3. And thus, if it be true, as it is, that the soul must proceed in its growing knowledge of God by learning that which He is not rather than that which He is, in order to come to Him, it must proceed by renouncing and rejecting, to the very uttermost, everything in its apprehensions that it is possible to renounce, whether this be natural or supernatural. We shall proceed with this end in view with regard to the memory, drawing it out from its natural state and limitations, and causing it to rise above itself -- that is, above all distinct knowledge and apprehensible possession -- to the supreme hope of God, Who is incomprehensible.

4. Beginning, then, with natural knowledge, I say that natural knowledge in the memory consists of all the kinds of knowledge that the memory can form concerning the objects of the five bodily senses -- namely: hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch -- and all kinds of knowledge of this type which it is possible to form and fashion. Of all these forms and kinds of knowledge the soul must strip and void itself, and it must strive to lose the imaginary apprehension of them, so that there may be left in it no kind of impression of knowledge, nor trace of aught soever, but rather the soul must remain barren and bare, as if these forms had never passed through it, and in total oblivion and suspension. And this cannot happen unless the memory be annihilated as to all its forms, if it is to be united with God. For it cannot happen save by total separation from all forms which are not God; for God comes beneath no definite form or kind of knowledge whatsoever, as we have said in treating of the night of the understanding. And since, as Christ says, no man can serve two masters,<sup>481</sup> the memory cannot be united both with God and with forms and distinct kinds of knowledge and, as God has no form or image that can be comprehended by the memory, it follows that, when the memory is united with God (as is seen, too, every day by experience), it remains without form and without figure, its imagination being lost and itself being absorbed in a supreme good, and in a great oblivion, remembering nothing. For that Divine union voids its fancy and sweeps it clean of all forms and kinds of knowledge and raises it to the supernatural.

---

<sup>481</sup>[St. Matthew vi, 24.]

5. Now there sometimes comes to pass here a notable thing; for occasionally, when God brings about these touches of union in the memory, the brain (where memory has its seat) is so perceptibly upset that it seems as if it becomes quite inert, and its judgment and sense are lost. This is sometimes more perceptible and sometimes less so, according to the strength of this touch, and then, by reason of this union, the memory is voided and purged, as I say, of all kinds of knowledge. It remains in oblivion - at times in complete oblivion -- so that it has to put forth a great effort and to labour greatly in order to remember anything.

6. And sometimes this oblivion of the memory and suspension of the imagination reach such a point, because of the union of the memory with God, that a long time passes without the soul's perceiving it, or knowing what has taken place during that period. And, as the imaginative faculty is then in suspension, it feels naught that is done to it, not even things that cause pain; for without imagination there is no feeling, not even coming through thought, since this exists not. And, to the end that God may bring about these touches of union, the soul must needs withdraw its memory from all apprehensible kinds of knowledge. And it is to be noted that these suspensions come not to pass in those that are already perfect, since they have attained to perfect union, and these suspensions belong to the beginnings of union.

7. Someone will remark that all this seems very well, but that it leads to the destruction of the natural use and course of the faculties, and reduces man to the state of a beast -- a state of oblivion and even worse -- since he becomes incapable of reasoning or of remembering his natural functions and necessities. It will be argued that God destroys not nature, but rather perfects it; and that from this teaching there necessarily follows its destruction, when that which pertains to morality and reason is not practised and is forgotten, neither is that which is natural practised; for (it will be said) none of these things can be remembered, as the soul is deprived of forms and kinds of knowledge which are the means of remembrance.

8. To this I reply that, the more nearly the memory attains to union with God, the more do distinct kinds of knowledge become perfected within it, until it loses them entirely -- namely, when it attains to the state of union in perfection. And thus, at the beginning, when this is first taking place, the soul cannot but fall into great oblivion with respect to all things, since forms and kinds of knowledge are being erased from it; and therefore it is very negligent concerning its outward behaviour and usage -- forgetting to eat or drink, and being uncertain if it has done this or no, if it has seen this or no, if it has said this or no -- because of the absorption of the memory in God. But when once it attains to the habit of union, which is a supreme blessing, it no longer has these periods of oblivion, after this manner, in that which pertains to natural and moral reason; actions which are seemly and necessary, indeed, it performs with a much greater degree of perfection, although it performs them no longer by means of forms and manners of knowledge pertaining to the memory. For, when it has the habit of union, which is a supernatural state, memory and the other faculties fail it completely in their natural functions, and pass beyond their natural limitations, even to God, Who is supernatural. And thus, when the memory is transformed in God, it cannot receive impressions of forms or kinds of knowledge. Wherefore the functions of the memory and of the other faculties in this state are all Divine; for, when at last God possesses the faculties and has become the entire master of them, through their transformation into Himself, it is He Himself Who moves and commands them divinely, according to His Divine Spirit and will; and the result of this is that the operations of the soul are not distinct, but all that it

does is of God, and its operations are Divine, so that, even as Saint Paul says, he that is joined unto God becomes one spirit with Him.<sup>482</sup>

9. Hence it comes to pass that the operations of the soul in union are of the Divine Spirit and are Divine. And hence it comes that the actions of such souls are only those that are seemly and reasonable, and not those that are ill-beseeming. For the Spirit of God teaches them that which they ought to know, and causes them to be ignorant of that which it behoves them not to know, and to remember that which they have to remember, with or without forms, and to forget that which they should forget; and it makes them love that which they have to love, and not to love that which is not in God. And thus, all the first motions of the faculties of such souls are Divine and it is not to be wondered at that the motions and operations of these faculties should be Divine, since they are transformed in the Divine Being.<sup>483</sup>

10. Of these operations I will give a few examples. Let this be one. A person asks another who is in this state to commend him to God. This person will not remember to do so by means of any form or kind of knowledge that remains in his memory concerning that other person; if it be right that he should recommend him to God (which will be if God desires to receive a prayer for that person), He will move his will and give him a desire to pray for him; and if God desires not such prayer, that other person will not be able nor will desire to pray, though he make great efforts to do so; and at times God will cause him to pray for others of whom he has no knowledge nor has ever heard. And this is because, as I have said, God alone moves the faculties of these souls to do those works which are meet, according to the will and ordinance of God, and they cannot be moved to do others; and thus the works and prayers of these souls are always effectual. Such were those of the most glorious Virgin Our Lady, who, being raised to this high estate from the beginning, had never the form of any creature imprinted in her soul, neither was moved by such, but was invariably guided by the Holy Spirit.

11. Another example. At a certain time a person in this state has to attend to some necessary business. He will remember it by no kind of form, but, without his knowing how, it will come to his soul, at the time and in the manner that it ought to come, and that without fail.

12. And not only in these things does the Holy Spirit give such persons light, but also in many others, relating both to the present and to the future, and even, in many cases, as regards those absent from them; and although at times this comes to pass through intellectual forms, it frequently happens without the intervention of any forms that can be apprehended, so that these persons know not how they know. But this comes to them from the Divine Wisdom; for, since these souls exercise themselves in knowing and apprehending nothing with the faculties, they come in general, as we have said in the Mount,<sup>484</sup> to know everything, according to that which the Wise Man says: 'The worker of all things, who is Wisdom, taught me all things.'<sup>485</sup>

13. You will say, perhaps, that the soul will be unable to void and deprive its

---

<sup>482</sup>1 Corinthians vi, 17.

<sup>483</sup>P. JosŽ de Jescs Mar'a, in his *Vida y excelencias de la Sant'sima Virgen Mar'a* (I, xl), quotes this and part of the last paragraph from what he claims to be an original MS. of St. John of the Cross, but his text varies considerably from that of any MS. now known. [P. Silverio considers that this and other similar citations are quite untrustworthy.]

<sup>484</sup>The reference is to the drawing of the Mount of Perfection. Cf. The General Introduction, I, above.

<sup>485</sup>Wisdom vii, 21.

memory of all forms and fancies to such an extent as to be able to attain to so lofty a state; for there are two things so difficult that their accomplishment surpasses human ability and strength, namely, to throw off with one's natural powers that which is natural, which is hard enough,<sup>486</sup> and to attain and be united to the supernatural, which is much more difficult -- indeed, to speak the truth, is impossible with natural ability alone. The truth, I repeat, is that God must place the soul in this supernatural state; but the soul, as far as in it lies, must be continually preparing itself; and this it can do by natural means, especially with the help that God is continually giving it. And thus, as the soul, for its own part, enters into this renunciation and self-emptying of forms, so God begins to give it the possession of union; and this God works passively in the soul, as we shall say, *Deo dante*, when we treat of the passive night of the soul. And thus, when it shall please God, and according to the manner of the soul's preparation, He will grant it the habit of perfect and Divine union.

14. And the Divine effects which God produces in the soul when He has granted it this habit, both as to the understanding and as to the memory and will, we shall not describe in this account of the soul's active purgation and night, for this alone will not bring the soul to Divine union. We shall speak of these effects, however, in treating of the passive night, by means of which is brought about the union of the soul with God.<sup>487</sup> And so I shall speak here only of the necessary means whereby the memory may place itself actively in this night and purgation, as far as lies in its power. And these means are that the spiritual man must habitually exercise caution, after this manner. All the things that he hears, sees, smells, tastes, or touches, he must be careful not to store up or collect in his memory, but he must allow himself to forget them immediately, and this he must accomplish, if need be, with the same efficacy as that with which others contrive to remember them, so that there remains in his memory no knowledge or image of them whatsoever. It must be with him as if they existed not in the world, and his memory must be left free and disencumbered of them, and be tied to no consideration, whether from above or from below; as if he had no faculty of memory; he must freely allow everything

---

<sup>486</sup>[*Lit.*, 'which cannot be' (*que no puede ser*), but this is a well-known Spanish hyperbole describing what is extremely difficult.]

<sup>487</sup>E.p. omits all the rest of this paragraph, substituting the following passage, which it introduces in order [says P. Silverio] to describe the scope of the Saint's teaching, and which is copied in the edition of 1630:

In [treating of] this purgation of the memory, I speak here only of the necessary means whereby the memory may place itself actively in this night and purgation, as far as lies in its power. And these means are that the spiritual man must habitually exercise caution, after this manner. Of all the things that he sees, hears, smells, tastes or touches he must make no particular store in the memory, or pay heed to them, or dwell upon them, but must allow them to pass and must remain in holy oblivion without reflecting upon them, save when necessary for some good reflection or meditation. And this care to forget and forsake knowledge and images is never applicable to Christ and His Humanity. For, although occasionally, at the height of contemplation and simple regard of the Divinity, the soul may not remember this most sacred Humanity, because God, with His own hand, has raised the soul to this, as it were, confused and most supernatural knowledge, yet it is in no wise seemly to study to forget it, since looking and meditating lovingly upon it will aid the soul to [attain] all that is good, and it is by its means that the soul will most readily rise to the most lofty state of union. And it is clear that, although other bodily and visible things are a hindrance and ought to be forgotten, we must not include among these Him Who became man for our salvation, and Who is the truth, the door, the way and the guide to all good things. This being assumed, let the soul strive after complete abstraction and oblivion, so that, in so far as is possible, there may remain in its memory no more knowledge or image of created things than though they existed not in the world; and let it leave the memory free and disencumbered for God, and, as it were, lost in holy oblivion.



to fall into oblivion as though all things were a hindrance to him; and in fact everything that is natural, if one attempt to make use of it in supernatural matters, is a hindrance rather than a help.

15. And if those questions and objections which arose above with respect to the understanding should also arise here (the objections, that is to say, that the soul is doing nothing, is wasting its time and is depriving itself of spiritual blessings which it might well receive through the memory), the answer to this has already been given, and will be given again farther on, in our treatment of the passive night; wherefore there is no need for us to dwell upon it here. It is needful only to observe that, although at certain times the benefit of this suspension of forms and of all knowledge may not be realized, the spiritual man must not for that reason grow weary, for in His own time God will not fail to succour him. To attain so great a blessing it behoves the soul to endure much and to suffer with patience and hope.

16. And, although it is true that hardly any soul will be found that is moved by God in all things and at all times, and has such continual union with God that, without the mediation of any form, its faculties are ever moved divinely, there are nevertheless souls who in their operations are very habitually moved by God, and these are not they that are moved of themselves, for, as Saint Paul says, the sons of God who are transformed and united in God, are moved by the Spirit of God,<sup>488</sup> that is, are moved to perform Divine work in their faculties. And it is no marvel that their operations should be Divine, since the union of the soul is Divine.

### CHAPTER III

*Wherein are described three kinds of evil which come to the soul when it enters not into darkness with respect to knowledge and reflections in the memory. Herein is described the first.*

TO three kinds of evil and inconvenience the spiritual man is subject when he persists in desiring to make use of all natural knowledge and reflections of the memory in order to journey toward God, or for any other purpose: two of these are positive and one is privative. The first comes from things of the world; the second, from the devil; the third, which is privative, is the impediment and hindrance to Divine union caused and effected in the soul.

2. The first evil, which comes from the world, consists in the subjection of the soul, through knowledge and reflection, to many kinds of harm, such as falsehoods, imperfections, desires, opinions, loss of time, and many other things which breed many kinds of impurity in the soul. And it is clear that the soul must of necessity fall into many perils of falsehood, when it admits knowledge and reasoning; for oftentimes that which is true must appear false, and that which is certain, doubtful; and contrariwise; for there is scarcely a single truth of which we can have complete knowledge. From all these things the soul is free if the memory enters into darkness with respect to every kind of reflection and knowledge.

3. Imperfections meet the soul at every step if it sets its memory upon that which it has heard, seen, touched, smelt and tasted; for there must then perforce cling to it

---

<sup>488</sup>Romans viii, 14.

some affection, whether this be of pain, of fear, of hatred, of vain hope, vain enjoyment, vainglory, etc.; for all these are, at the least, imperfections, and at times are downright<sup>489</sup> venial sins; and they leave much impurity most subtly in the soul, even though the reflections and the knowledge have relation to God. And it is also clear that they engender desires within the soul, for these arise naturally from the knowledge and reflections aforementioned, and if one wishes only to have this knowledge and these reflections, even that is a desire. And it is clearly seen that many occasions of judging others will come likewise; for, in using its memory, the soul cannot fail to come upon that which is good and bad in others, and, in such a case, that which is evil oftentimes seems good, and that which is good, evil. I believe there is none who can completely free himself from all these kinds of evil, save by blinding his memory and leading it into darkness with regard to all these things.

4. And if you tell me that a man is well able to conquer all these things when they come to him, I reply that, if he sets store by knowledge, this is simply and utterly impossible; for countless imperfections and follies insinuate themselves into such knowledge, some of which are so subtle and minute that, without the soul's realization thereof, they cling to it of their own accord, even as pitch clings to the man that touches it; so that it is better to conquer once for all by denying the memory completely. You will say likewise that by so doing the soul deprives itself of many good thoughts and meditations upon God, which are of great profit to it and whereby God grants it favours. I reply that to this end purity of soul is of the greatest profit, which means that there clings to the soul no creature affection, or temporal affection, or effective advertence; which I believe cannot but cling to the soul because of the imperfection which the faculties have in their own operations. Wherefore it is best to learn to silence the faculties and to cause them to be still, so that God may speak. For, as we have said, in order to attain to this state the natural operations must be completely disregarded, and this happens, as the Prophet says, when the soul comes into solitude, according to these its faculties, and God speaks to its heart.<sup>490</sup>

5. And if you again reply, saying that the soul will have no blessing unless it meditates upon God and allows its memory to reflect upon Him, and that many distractions and negligences will continually enter it, I say that it is impossible, if the memory be recollected with regard both to things of the next life and to things here below, that evils or distractions should enter it, nor any other follies or vices (the which things always enter when the memory wanders), since there is no exit or entrance for them. This would come to pass if, when we had shut the door upon considerations and reflections concerning things above, we opened it to things below; but in this state we shut the door to all things whence distraction may come,<sup>491</sup> causing the memory to be still and dumb, and the ear of the spirit to be attentive, in silence, to God alone, saying with the Prophet: 'Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth.'<sup>492</sup> It was thus that the Spouse in the Songs said that his Bride should be, in these words: 'My sister is a garden enclosed and a fountain sealed up'<sup>493</sup> -- that is to say, enclosed and sealed up against all things that may enter.

---

<sup>489</sup>[*Lit.*, 'good.']

<sup>490</sup>Osee ii, 14.

<sup>491</sup>[*Lit.*, 'whence that may come.']

<sup>492</sup>1 Kings [A.V., 1 Samuel] iii, 10.

<sup>493</sup>Canticles iv, 12.

6. Let the soul, then, remain 'enclosed,' without anxieties and troubles, and He that entered in bodily form to His disciples when the doors were shut, and gave them peace,<sup>494</sup> though they neither knew nor thought that this was possible nor knew how it was possible, will enter spiritually into the soul, without its knowing how He does so, when the doors of its faculties -- memory, understanding and will -- are enclosed against all apprehensions. And He will fill them with peace, coming down upon the soul, as the prophet says, like a river of peace,<sup>495</sup> and taking it from all the misgivings and suspicions, disturbances and darkenesses which caused it to fear that it was lost or was on the way to being so. Let it not grow careless about prayer, and let it wait in detachment and emptiness, for its blessings will not tarry.

## CHAPTER IV

*Which treats of the second kind of evil that may come to the soul from the devil by way of the natural apprehensions of the memory.*

THE second positive evil that may come to the soul by means of the knowledge of the memory proceeds from the devil, who by this means obtains great influence over it. For he can continually bring it new forms, kinds of knowledge and reflections, by means whereof he can taint the soul with pride, avarice, wrath, envy, etc., and cause it unjust hatred, or vain love, and deceive it in many ways. And besides this, he is wont to leave impressions,<sup>496</sup> and to implant them in the fancy, in such wise that those that are false appear true, and those that are true, false. And finally all the worst deceptions which are caused by the devil, and the evils that he brings to the soul, enter by way of knowledge and reflections of the memory. Thus if the memory enter into darkness with respect to them all, and be annihilated in its oblivion to them, it shuts the door altogether upon this evil which proceeds from the devil, and frees itself from all these things, which is a great blessing. For the devil has no power over the soul unless it be through the operations of its faculties, principally by means of knowledge, whereupon depend almost all the other operations of the other faculties. Wherefore, if the memory be annihilated with respect to them, the devil can do naught; for he finds no foothold, and without a foothold he is powerless.<sup>497</sup>

2. I would that spiritual persons might clearly see how many kinds of harm are wrought by evil spirits in their souls by means of the memory, when they devote themselves frequently to making use of it, and how many kinds of sadness and affliction and vain and evil joys they have, both with respect to their thoughts about God, and also with respect to the things of the world; and how many impurities are left rooted in their spirits; and likewise how greatly they are distracted from the highest recollection, which consists in the fixing of the whole soul, according to its faculties, upon the one incomprehensible Good, and in withdrawing it from all things that can be apprehended, since these are not incomprehensible Good. This is a great good (although less good results from this emptiness than from the soul's fixing itself upon God), simply because

---

<sup>494</sup>[St. John xx, 19].

<sup>495</sup>Isaiah xlviii, 18.

<sup>496</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to leave things.']

<sup>497</sup>[*Lit.*, 'he finds nothing to seize upon, and with nothing he can do nothing.']

it is the cause whereby the soul frees itself from any griefs and afflictions and sorrows, over and above the imperfections and sins from which it is freed.

## CHAPTER V

*Of the third evil which comes to the soul by way of the distinct natural knowledge or the memory.*

THE third evil which comes to the soul through the natural apprehensions of the memory is privative; for these apprehensions can hinder moral good and deprive us of spiritual good. And, in order that we may first of all explain how these apprehensions hinder moral good in the soul, it must be known that moral good consists in the restraining of the passions and the curbing of disorderly desires, from which restraint there come to the soul tranquillity, peace and rest, and moral virtues, all of which things are moral good. This restraining and curbing of the passions cannot be truly accomplished by the soul that forgets not and withdraws not itself from things pertaining to itself, whence arise the affections; and no disturbances ever arise in the soul save through the apprehensions of the memory. For, when all things are forgotten, there is naught that can disturb peace or that moves the desires; since, as they say, that which the eye sees not the heart desires not.

2. This we are constantly learning by experience; for we observe that, whenever the soul begins to think of any matter, it is moved and disturbed, either much or little, with respect to that thing, according to the nature of its apprehension. If it be a troublesome and grievous matter, the soul finds sadness in it; if pleasant, desire and joy, and so forth. Wherefore the result of the changing of that apprehension is necessarily disturbance; and thus the soul is now joyful, now sad; now it hates, now loves; and it cannot continue in one and the same attitude (which is an effect of moral tranquillity save when it strives to forget all things. It is clear, then, that knowledge greatly hinders the good of the moral virtues in the soul.

3. Again, what has been said clearly proves that an encumbered memory also hinders spiritual good; for the soul that is disturbed, and has no foundation of moral good, is to that extent incapable of spiritual good, which impresses itself only upon souls that are restrained and at peace. And besides this, if the soul pays attention and heed to the apprehensions of the memory -- seeing that it can attend to but one thing at a time -- and busies itself with things that can be apprehended, such as the knowledge of the memory, it is not possible for it to be free to attend to the incomprehensible, which is God. For, in order to approach God, the soul must proceed by not comprehending rather than by comprehending; it must exchange the mutable and comprehensible for the immutable and incomprehensible.

## CHAPTER VI

*Of the benefits which come to the soul from forgetfulness and emptiness of all thoughts and knowledge which it may have in a natural way with respect to the memory.*

FROM the evils which, as we have said, come to the soul through the apprehensions of

the memory, we can likewise infer the benefits which are contrary to them and come to the soul as a result of its forgetting them and emptying itself of them. For, as natural philosophy puts it, the same doctrine which serves for one thing serves likewise for the contrary. In the first place, the soul enjoys tranquillity and peace of mind, since it is freed from the disturbance and the changeableness which arise from thoughts and ideas of the memory, and consequently, which is more important, it enjoys purity of conscience and soul. And herein the soul has ample preparation for the acquiring of Divine and human wisdom, and of the virtues.

2. In the second place, it is freed from many suggestions, temptations and motions of the devil, which he infuses into the soul by means of thoughts and ideas, causing it to fall into many impurities and sins, as David says in these words: 'They have thought and spoken wickedness.'<sup>498</sup> And thus, when these thoughts have been completely removed, the devil has naught wherewith to assault the soul by natural means.

3. In the third place, the soul has within itself, through this recollection of itself and this forgetfulness as to all things, a preparedness to be moved by the Holy Spirit and taught by Him, for, as the Wise Man says, He removes Himself from thoughts that are without understanding.<sup>499</sup> Even if a man received no other benefit from this forgetfulness and emptiness of the memory than being freed thereby from troubles and disturbances, it would be a great gain and good for him. For the troubles and storms which adverse things and happenings arouse in the soul are of no use or help for bringing peace and calm;<sup>500</sup> indeed, as a rule, they make things worse and also harm the soul itself. Wherefore David said: 'Of a truth every man is disquieted in vain.'<sup>501</sup> For it is clear that to disquiet oneself is always vain since it brings profit to none. And thus, even if everything came to an end and were destroyed, and if all things went wrong and turned to adversity, it would be vain to disturb oneself; for such disturbance hurts a man rather than relieves him. Whereas to bear everything with equable and peaceful tranquillity not only brings the soul the profit of many blessings, but likewise causes it, even in the midst of its adversities, to form a truer judgment about them and to find a fitting remedy.

4. For this reason Solomon, being well acquainted both with the evil and with the benefit of which we are speaking, said: 'I knew that there was naught better for man than to rejoice and to do good in his life.'<sup>502</sup> By this he meant that, in everything that happens to us, howsoever adverse it be, we should rejoice rather than be disturbed, so that we may not lose a blessing which is greater than any kind of prosperity -- namely, tranquillity and peace of mind in all things, which, whether they bring adversity or prosperity, we must bear in the same manner. This a man would never lose if he were not only to forget all kinds of knowledge and put aside all thoughts, but would even withdraw himself from hearing, sight and commerce with others, in so far as was possible for him. Our nature is so frail and unstable that, however well it be disciplined, it will hardly fail to stumble upon the remembrance of things which will disturb and change a mind that was in peace and tranquillity when it remembered them not. For this

---

<sup>498</sup>Psalm lxxii, 8 [A.V., lxxiii, 8].

<sup>499</sup>Wisdom i, 5.

<sup>500</sup>[*Lit.*, 'for the peace and calm of the same things and happenings.']

<sup>501</sup>Psalm xxxviii, 7 [A.V. xxxix, 6].

<sup>502</sup>Ecclesiastes iii, 12.

cause said Jeremias: 'With memory I will remember, and my soul will fail me for pain.'<sup>503</sup>

## CHAPTER VII

*Which treats of the second kind of apprehension of the memory -- namely, imaginary apprehensions -- and of supernatural knowledge.*

ALTHOUGH in writing of natural apprehensions of the first kind we also gave instruction concerning the imaginary, which are likewise natural, it was well to make this division because of the love which the memory always has for other forms and kinds of knowledge, which are of supernatural things, such as visions, revelations, locutions and feelings which come in a supernatural way. When these things have passed through the soul, there is wont to remain impressed upon it some image, form, figure or idea, whether in the soul or in the memory or fancy, at times very vividly and effectively. Concerning these images it is also needful to give advice, lest the memory be encumbered with them and they be a hindrance to its union with God in perfect and pure hope.

2. I say that the soul, in order to attain that blessing, must never reflect upon the clear and distinct objects which may have passed through its mind by supernatural means, in such a way as to preserve within itself the forms and figures and knowledge of those things. For we must ever bear in mind this principle: the greater heed the soul gives to any clear and distinct apprehensions, whether natural or supernatural, the less capacity and preparation it has for entering into the abyss of faith, wherein are absorbed all things else. For, as has been said, no supernatural forms or kinds of knowledge which can be apprehended by the memory are God, and, in order to reach God, the soul must void itself of all that is not God. The memory must also strip itself of all these forms and kinds of knowledge, that it may unite itself with God in hope. For all possession is contrary to hope, which, as Saint Paul says, belongs to that which is not possessed.<sup>504</sup> Wherefore, the more the memory dispossesses itself, the greater is its hope; and the more it has of hope, the more it has of union with God; for, with respect to God, the more the soul hopes, the more it attains. And it hopes most when it is most completely dispossessed; and, when it shall be perfectly dispossessed, it will remain with the perfect possession of God, in Divine union. But there are many who will not deprive themselves of the sweetness and delight which memory finds in those forms and notions, wherefore they attain not to supreme possession and perfect sweetness. For he that renounces not all that he possesses cannot be the disciple of Christ.<sup>505</sup>

## CHAPTER VIII

*Of the evils which may be caused in the soul by the knowledge of supernatural things, if it reflect upon them. Says how many these evils are.*

---

<sup>503</sup>Lamentations iii, 20.

<sup>504</sup>Hebrews xi, 1.

<sup>505</sup>St. Luke xiv, 33.

THE spiritual man incurs the risk of five kinds of evil if he pays heed to, and reflects upon, these forms and ideas which are impressed upon him by the things which pass through his mind in a supernatural way.

2. The first is that he is frequently deceived, and mistakes one thing for another. The second is that he is like to fall, and is exposed to the danger of falling, into some form of presumption or vanity. The third is that the devil has many occasions of deceiving him by means of the apprehensions aforementioned. The fourth is that he is hindered as to union in hope with God. The fifth is that, for the most part, he has a low judgment of God.

3. As to the first evil, it is clear that, if the spiritual man pays heed to these forms and notions, and reflects upon them, he must frequently be deceived in his judgment of them; for, as no man can have a complete understanding of the things that pass through his imagination naturally, nor a perfect and certain judgment about them, he will be much less able still to have this with respect to supernatural things, which are above our capacity to understand, and occur but rarely. Wherefore he will often think that what comes but from his fancy pertains to God; and often, too, that what is of God is of the devil, and what is of the devil is of God. And very often there will remain with him deep-seated impressions of forms and ideas concerning the good and evil of others, or of himself, together with other figures which have been presented to him: these he will consider to be most certain and true, when in fact they will not be so, but very great falsehoods. And others will be true, and he will judge them to be false, although this error I consider safer, as it is apt to arise from humility.

4. And, even if he be not deceived as to their truth, he may well be deceived as to their quantity or quality, thinking that little things are great, and great things, little. And with respect to their quality, he may consider what is in his imagination to be this or that, when it is something quite different; he may put, as Isaias says, darkness for light, and light for darkness, or bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter.<sup>506</sup> And finally, even though he be correct as to one thing, it will be a marvel if he goes not astray with respect to the next; for, although he may not desire to apply his judgment to the judging of them, yet, if he apply it in paying heed to them, this will be sufficient to make some evil to cling to him as a result of it, at least passively; if not evil of this kind, then of one of the four other kinds of which we shall shortly speak.

5. It behoves the spiritual man, therefore, lest he fall into this evil of being deceived in his judgment, not to desire to apply his judgment in order to know the nature of his own condition or feelings, or the nature of such and such a vision, idea or feeling; neither should he desire to know it or to pay heed to it. This he should only desire in order to speak of it to his spiritual father, and to be taught by him how to void his memory of these apprehensions. For, whatever may be their intrinsic nature, they cannot help him to love God as much as the smallest act of living faith and hope performed in the emptiness and renunciation of all things.

## CHAPTER IX

*Of the second kind of evil, which is the peril of falling into self-esteem and vain presumption.*

---

<sup>506</sup>Isaias v, 20.

THE supernatural apprehensions of the memory already described are also a frequent occasion to spiritual persons of falling into some kind of presumption or vanity, if they give heed to them and set store by them. For, even as he who knows nothing of them is quite free from falling into this vice, since he sees in himself no occasion of presumption, even so, in contrary wise, he that has experience of them has close at hand an occasion for thinking himself to be something, since he possesses these supernatural communications. For, although it is true that he may attribute them to God, hold himself to be unworthy of them, and give God the thanks, yet nevertheless there is wont to remain in his spirit a certain secret satisfaction, and a self-esteem and a sense of their value, from which, without his knowledge, there will come to him great spiritual pride.

2. This may be observed very clearly by such as will consider the dislike and aversion caused them by any who do not praise their spirituality, or esteem the experiences which they enjoy, and the mortification which they suffer when they think or are told that others have just those same experiences, or even superior ones. All this arises from secret self-esteem and pride, and they can never quite realize that they are steeped in pride up to their very eyes. For they think that a certain degree of recognition of their own wretchedness suffices, and, although they have this, they are full of secret self-esteem and self-satisfaction, taking more delight in their own spirituality and spiritual gifts than in those of others. They are like the Pharisee who gave thanks to God that he was not as other men, and that he practised such and such virtues, whereat he was satisfied with himself and presumed thereon.<sup>507</sup> Such men, although they may not use the Pharisee's actual words, habitually resemble him in spirit. And some of them even become so proud that they are worse than the devil. For, observing in themselves, as they imagine, certain apprehensions and feelings concerning God which are devout and sweet, they become self-satisfied to such an extent that they believe themselves to be very near God; and those that are not like themselves they consider very low and despise them after the manner of the Pharisee.

3. In order to flee from this pestilent evil, abhorrent in the eyes of God, they must consider two things. First, that virtue consists not in apprehensions and feelings concerning God, howsoever sublime they be, nor in anything of this kind that a man can feel within himself; but, on the contrary, in that which has nothing to do with feeling -- namely, a great humility and contempt of oneself and of all that pertains to oneself, firmly rooted in the soul and keenly felt by it; and likewise in being glad that others feel in this very way concerning oneself and in not wishing to be of any account in the esteem<sup>508</sup> of others.

4. Secondly, it must be noted that all visions, revelations and feelings coming from Heaven, and any thoughts that may proceed from these, are of less worth than the least act of humility. And humility is one of the effects of charity, which esteems not its own things nor strives to attain them; nor thinks evil, save of itself; nor thinks any good thing of itself, but only of others. It is well, therefore, that these supernatural apprehensions should not attract men's eyes, but that they should strive to forget them in order that they may be free.

---

<sup>507</sup>St. Luke xviii, 11-12.

<sup>508</sup>[*Lit.*, 'in the heart.']



## CHAPTER X

*Of the third evil that may come to the soul from the devil, through the imaginary apprehensions of the memory.*

FROM all that has been said above it may be clearly understood and inferred how great is the evil that may come to the soul from the devil by way of these supernatural apprehensions. For not only can he represent to the memory and the fancy many false forms and ideas, which seem true and good, impressing them on spirit and sense with great effectiveness and certifying them to be true by means of suggestion (so that it appears to the soul that it cannot be otherwise, but that everything is even as he represents it; for, as he transfigures himself into an angel of light, he appears as light to the soul); but he may also tempt the soul in many ways with respect to true knowledge, which is of God, moving its desires and affections, whether spiritual or sensual, in unruly fashion with respect to these; for, if the soul takes pleasure in such apprehensions, it is very easy for the devil to cause its desires and affections to grow within it, and to make it fall into spiritual gluttony and other evils.

2. And, in order the better to do this, he is wont to suggest and give pleasure, sweetness and delight to the senses with respect to these same things of God, so that the soul is corrupted and bewildered<sup>509</sup> by that sweetness, and is thus blinded with that pleasure and sets its eyes on pleasure rather than on love (or, at least, very much more than upon love), and gives more heed to the apprehensions than to the detachment and emptiness which are found in faith and hope and love of God. And from this he may go on gradually to deceive the soul and cause it to believe his falsehoods with great facility. For to the soul that is blind falsehood no longer appears to be falsehood, nor does evil appear to be evil, etc.; for darkness appears to be light, and light, darkness; and hence that soul comes to commit a thousand foolish errors, whether with respect to natural things, or to moral things, or to spiritual things; so that that which was wine to it becomes vinegar. All this happens to the soul because it began not, first of all, by denying itself the pleasure of those supernatural things. At first this is a small matter, and not very harmful, and the soul has therefore no misgivings, and allows it to continue, and it grows, like the grain of mustard seed, into a tall tree. For a small error at the beginning, as they say, becomes a great error in the end.

3. Wherefore, in order to flee from this great evil, which comes from the devil, the soul must not desire to have any pleasure in such things, because such pleasure will most surely lead it to become blind and to fall. For of their own nature, and without the help of the devil, pleasure and delight and sweetness blinds the soul. And this was the meaning of David when he said: 'Perhaps darkness shall blind me in my delights and I shall have the night for my light.'<sup>510</sup>

## CHAPTER XI

---

<sup>509</sup>[The two verbs, in the original, have very definite and concrete meanings, 'sweetened with honey' and 'dazzled by a lamp' respectively.]

<sup>510</sup>Psalms cxxxviii, 11 [A.V., cxxxix, 11].

*Of the fourth evil that comes to the soul from the distinct supernatural apprehensions of the memory, which is the hindrance that it interposes to union.*

CONCERNING this fourth evil there is not much to be said, since it has already been treated again and again in this third book, wherein we have proved how, in order that the soul may come to union with God in hope, it must renounce every possession of the memory; for, in order that its hope in God may be perfect, it must have naught in the memory that is not God. And, as we have likewise said, no form or figure or image or other kind of knowledge that may come to the memory can be God, neither can be like Him, whether it be of heaven or of earth, natural or supernatural, even as David teaches, when he says: 'Lord, among the gods there is none like unto Thee.'<sup>511</sup>

2. Wherefore, if the memory desires to pay heed to any of these things, it hinders the soul from reaching God; first, because it encumbers it, and next because, the more the soul has of possession, the less it has of hope. Wherefore it is needful for the soul to be stripped of the distinct forms and the knowledge of supernatural things, and to become oblivious to them, so that the memory may cause no hindrance to its union with God in perfect hope.

## CHAPTER XII

*Of the fifth evil that may come to the soul in supernatural imaginary forms and apprehensions, which is a low and unseemly judgment of God.*

NO less serious is the fifth evil that comes to the soul from its desire to retain in the memory and imagination the said forms and images of things that are supernaturally communicated to it, above all if it desires to use them as a means to Divine union. For it is a very easy thing to judge of the Being and greatness of God less worthily and nobly than befits His incomprehensible nature; for, although our reason and judgment may form no express conception that God is like any one of these things, yet the very esteeming of these apprehensions, if in fact the soul esteems them, makes and causes it not to esteem God, or not to feel concerning Him, as highly as faith teaches, since faith tells us that He is incomparable, incomprehensible, and so forth. For, quite apart from the fact that the soul takes from God all that it gives to the creature, it is natural that its esteem of these apprehensible things should lead it to make a certain inward comparison between such things and God, which would prevent it from judging and esteeming God as highly as it ought. For the creatures, whether terrestrial or celestial, and all distinct images and kinds of knowledge, both natural and supernatural, that can be encompassed by the faculties of the soul, however lofty they be in this life, have no comparison or proportion with the Being of God, since God falls within no genus and no species, whereas the creatures do, or so the theologians tell us. And the soul in this life is not capable of receiving in a clear and distinct manner aught save that which falls within genus and species. For this cause Saint John says that no man hath seen God at any time.<sup>512</sup> And Isaias says it has not entered into the heart of man what God is like.<sup>513</sup>

---

<sup>511</sup>Psalm lxxxv, 8 [A.V., lxxxvi, 8].

<sup>512</sup>St. John i, 18.

<sup>513</sup>Isaias lxiv, 4.

And God said to Moses that he could not see Him while he was in this mortal state.<sup>514</sup> Wherefore he that encumbers his memory and the other faculties of the soul with that which they can comprehend cannot esteem God, neither feel concerning Him, as he ought.

2. Let us make a comparison on a lower level. It is clear that the more a man fixes his eyes upon the servants of a king, and the more notice he takes of them, the less notice does he take of the king himself, and the less does he esteem him; for, although this comparison may not be formally and distinctly present in the understanding, it is inherent in the act, since, the more attention the man gives to the servants, the more he takes from their lord; and he cannot have a very high opinion of the king if the servants appear to him to be of any importance while they are in the presence of the king, their lord. Even so does the soul treat its God when it pays heed to the creatures aforementioned. This comparison, however, is on a very low level, for, as we have said, God is of another being than His creatures in that He is infinitely far from them all. For this reason they must all be banished from sight, and the soul must withdraw its gaze from them in all their forms, that it may yet gaze on God through faith and hope.

3. Wherefore those who not only pay heed to the imaginary apprehensions aforementioned, but suppose God to be like some of them, and think that by means of them they will be able to attain to union with God, have already gone far astray and will ever continue to lose the light of faith in the understanding, through which this faculty is united with God; neither will they grow in the loftiness of hope, by means whereof the memory is united with God in hope, which must be brought about through disunion from all that is of the imagination.

## CHAPTER XIII

*Of the benefits which the soul receives through banishing from itself the apprehensions of the imagination. This chapter answers a certain objection and explains a difference which exists between apprehensions that are imaginary, natural and supernatural.*

THE benefits that come from voiding the imagination of imaginary forms can be clearly observed in the five evils aforementioned which they inflict upon the soul, if it desires to retain them, even as we also said of the natural forms. But, apart from these, there are other benefits for the spirit -- namely, those of great rest and quiet. For, setting aside that natural rest which the soul obtains when it is free from images and forms, it likewise becomes free from anxiety as to whether they are good or evil, and as to how it must behave with respect to the one and to the other. Nor has it to waste the labour and time of its spiritual masters by requiring them to decide if these things are good or evil, and if they are of this kind or of another; for the soul has no need to desire to know all this if it pays no heed to them. The time and energies which it would have wasted in dealing with these images and forms can be better employed in another and a more profitable exercise, which is that of the will with respect to God, and in having a care to seek detachment and poverty of spirit and sense, which consists in desiring earnestly to be without any consoling support that can be apprehended, whether interior or exterior.

---

<sup>514</sup>Exodus xxxiii, 20.

This we practise well when we desire and strive to strip ourselves of these forms, since from this there will proceed no less a benefit than that of approach to God (Who has no image, neither form nor figure), and this will be the greater according as the soul withdraws itself the more completely from all forms, images and figures of the imagination.

2. But perchance you will say: 'Why do many spiritual persons counsel the soul to strive to profit by the communications and feelings which come from God, and to desire to receive them from Him, that it may have something to give Him; since, if He gives us nothing, we shall give Him nothing likewise? And wherefore does Saint Paul say: 'Quench not the spirit?'<sup>515</sup> And the Spouse to the Bride: "Set Me as a seal upon thy heart and as a seal upon thine arm?"<sup>516</sup> This certainly denotes some kind of apprehension. And, according to the instruction given above, not only must all this not be striven after, but, even though God sends it, it must be rejected and cast aside. But surely it is clear that, since God gives it, He gives it to a good purpose, and it will have a good effect. We must not throw away pearls. And it is even a kind of pride to be unwilling to receive the things of God, as if we could do without them and were self-sufficient.'

3. In order to meet this objection it is necessary to recall what we said in the fifteenth and sixteenth chapters<sup>517</sup> of the second book, where to a great extent the difficulty is solved. For we said there that the good that overflows in the soul from supernatural apprehensions, when they come from a good source, is produced passively in the soul at that very instant when they are represented to the senses, without the working of any operation of the faculties. Wherefore it is unnecessary for the will to perform the act of receiving them; for, as we have also said, if at that time the soul should try to labour with its faculties, the effect of its own base and natural operation would be to hinder the supernatural graces<sup>518</sup> which God is even then working in it rather than that, through these apprehensions, God should cause it to derive any benefit from its active labour. Nay, rather, as the spirituality coming from those imaginary apprehensions is given passively to the soul, even so must the soul conduct itself passively with respect to them, setting no store by its inward or outward actions. To do this is to preserve the feelings that have their source in God, for in this way they are not lost through the soul's base manner of working. And this is not quenching the spirit; for the spirit would be quenched by the soul if it desired to behave in any other manner than that whereby God is leading it. And this it would be doing if, when God had given it spiritual graces<sup>519</sup> passively, as He does in these apprehensions, it should then desire to exert itself actively with respect to them, by labouring with its understanding or by seeking to find something in them. And this is clear because, if the soul desires to labour at that time with its own exertions, its work cannot be more than natural, for of itself it is capable of no more; for supernaturally it neither moves itself nor can move itself -- it is God that moves it and brings it to this state. And thus, if the soul at that time desires to labour with its own exertions (as far as lies in its power), its active working will hinder the passive work that God is

---

<sup>515</sup>1 Thessalonians v, 19.

<sup>516</sup>Canticles viii, 6.

<sup>517</sup>More correctly, in Chaps. xvi and xvii.

<sup>518</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the supernatural.']

<sup>519</sup>[*Lit.*, 'had given it spirit' (or 'spirituality').]

communicating to it, which is spirit.<sup>520</sup> It will be setting itself to its own work, which is of another and an inferior kind than that which God communicates to it; for the work of God is passive and supernatural, and that of the soul is active and natural; and in this way the soul would therefore be quenching the spirit.

4. That this activity of the soul is an inferior one is also clear from the fact that the faculties of the soul cannot, of their own power, reflect and act, save upon some form, figure and image, and this is the rind and accident of the substance and spirit which lie beneath this rind and accident. This substance and spirit unite not with the faculties of the soul in true understanding and love, save when at last the operation of the faculties ceases. For the aim and end of this operation is only that the substance which can be understood and loved and which lies beneath these forms may come to be received in the soul. The difference, therefore, between active and passive operation, and the superiority of the latter, corresponds to the difference between that which is being done and that which is done already, or between that which a man tries to attain and effect and that which is already effected. Hence it may likewise be inferred that, if the soul should desire to employ its faculties actively on these supernatural apprehensions, wherein God, as we have said, bestows the spirit of them passively, it would be doing nothing less than abandoning what it had already done, in order to do it again, neither would it enjoy what it had done, nor could it produce any other result by these actions of its own, save that of impeding what had been done already. For, as we say, the faculties cannot of their own power attain to the spirituality which God bestows upon the soul without any operation of their own. And thus the soul would be directly quenching the spirituality<sup>521</sup> which God infuses through these imaginary apprehensions aforementioned if it were to set any store by them; wherefore it must set them aside, and take up a passive and negative attitude with regard to them. For at that time God is moving the soul to things which are above its own power and knowledge. For this cause the Prophet said: 'I will stand upon my watch and set my step upon my tower, and I will watch to see that which will be said to me.'<sup>522</sup> This is as though he were to say: I will stand on guard over my faculties and I will take no step forward as to my actions, and thus I shall be able to contemplate that which will be said to me -- that is, I shall understand and enjoy that which will be communicated to me supernaturally.

5. And the passage which has been quoted concerning the Spouse is to be understood as referring to the love that He entreats of the Bride, the office of which love between two lovers is to make one like to the other in the most vital part of them. Wherefore He tells her to set Him as a seal upon her heart,<sup>523</sup> where all the arrows strike that leave the quiver of love, which arrows are the actions and motives of love. So they will all strike Him Who is there as a mark for them; and thus all will be for Him, so that the soul will become like Him through the actions and motions of love, until it be transformed in Him. Likewise he bids her set Him as a seal upon her arm, because the arm performs<sup>524</sup> the exercise of love, for by the arm the Beloved is sustained and comforted.

6. Therefore all that the soul has to endeavour to do with respect to all the

---

<sup>520</sup>[Or 'spirituality.']

<sup>521</sup>[Or 'the spirit.']

<sup>522</sup>Habacuc ii, 1. [The original has 'munition' for 'tower' and 'contemplate' for 'watch and see.']

<sup>523</sup>Canticles viii, 6.

<sup>524</sup>[*Lit.*, 'because in the arm is.']

apprehensions which come to it from above, whether imaginary or of any other kind -- it matters not if they be visions, locutions, feelings or revelations -- is to make no account of the letter or the kind (that is, of what is signified or represented or given to be understood), but to pay heed only to the possession of the love of God which they cause interiorly within the soul. And in this case the soul will make account, not of feelings of sweetness or delight, nor of figures, but of the feelings of love which they cause it. And with this sole end in view it may at times recall that image and apprehension caused it by love, in order to set the spirit on its course of love. For, though the effect of that apprehension be not so great afterwards, when it is recalled, as it was on the first occasion when it was communicated, yet, when it is recalled, love is renewed, and the mind is lifted up to God, especially when the recollection is of certain figures, images or feelings which are supernatural, and are wont to be sealed and imprinted upon the soul in such a way that they continue for a long time -- some of them, indeed, never leave the soul. And those that are thus sealed upon the soul produce in it Divine effects of love, sweetness, light and so forth, on almost every occasion when the soul returns to them, sometimes more so and sometimes less; for it was to this end that they were impressed upon it. And thus this is a great favour for the soul on which God bestows it, for it is as though it had within itself a mine of blessings.

7. The figures which produce effects such as these are deeply implanted in the soul, and are not like other images and forms that are retained in the fancy. And thus the soul has no need to have recourse to this faculty when it desires to recall them, for it sees that it has them within itself, and that they are as an image seen in the mirror. When it comes to pass that any soul has such figures formally within itself, it will then do well to recall them to the effect of love to which I have referred, for they will be no hindrance to the union of love in faith, since the soul will not desire to be absorbed in the figure, but only to profit by the love; it will immediately set aside the figure, which thus will rather be a help to it.

8. Only with great difficulty can it be known when these images are imprinted upon the soul, and when upon the fancy. For those which touch the fancy are as apt to occur very frequently as are the others; for certain persons are accustomed habitually to have imaginary visions in their imagination and fancy, which are presented to them in one form with great frequency; sometimes because the apprehensive power of the organ concerned is very great, and, however little they reflect upon it, that habitual figure is at once presented to, and outlined upon, their fancy; sometimes because it is the work of the devil; sometimes, again, because it is the work of God; but the visions are not formally imprinted upon the soul. They may be known, however, by their effects. For those that are natural, or that come from the devil, produce no good effect upon the soul, however frequently they be recalled, nor work its spiritual renewal, but the contemplation of them simply produces aridity. Those that are good, however, produce some good effect when they are recalled, like that which was produced in the soul upon the first occasion. But the formal images which are imprinted upon the soul almost invariably produce some effect in it, whensoever they are remembered.

9. He that has experienced these will readily distinguish the one kind from the other, for the great difference between them is very clear to anyone that has experience of them. I will merely say that those which are formally and durably imprinted upon the soul are of very rare occurrence. But, whether they be of this kind or of that, it is good for the soul to desire to understand nothing, save God alone, through faith, in hope. And if anyone makes the objection that to reject these things, if they are good, appears to be

pride, I reply that it is not so, but that it is prudent humility to profit by them in the best way, as has been said, and to be guided by that which is safest.

## CHAPTER XIV

*Which treats of spiritual knowledge in so far as it may concern the memory.*

WE classed spiritual forms of knowledge as the third division of the apprehensions of the memory, not because they belong to the bodily sense of the fancy, as do the others, for they have no bodily form and image, but because they are likewise apprehensible by spiritual memory and reminiscence. Now, after the soul has had experience of one of these apprehensions, it can recall it whensoever it will; and this is not by the effigy and image that the apprehension has left in the bodily sense, for, since this is of bodily form, as we say, it has no capacity for spiritual forms; but because it recalls it, intellectually and spiritually, by means of that form which it has left impressed upon the soul, which is likewise a formal or spiritual form or notion or image, whereby it is recalled, or by means of the effect that it has wrought. It is for this reason that I place these apprehensions among those of the memory, although they belong not to the apprehensions of the fancy.

2. What these kinds of knowledge are, and how the soul is to conduct itself with respect to them in order to attain to union with God, are sufficiently described in the twenty-fourth chapter<sup>525</sup> of the second book, where we treated this knowledge as apprehensions of the understanding. Let this be referred to, for we there described how it was of two kinds: either uncreated or of the creatures. I speak now only of things relating to my present purpose -- namely, how the memory must behave with respect to them in order to attain to union. And I say, as I have just said of formal knowledge in the preceding chapter (for this, being of created things, is of the same kind), that these apprehensions may be recalled when they produce good effects, not that they may be dwelt upon, but that they may quicken the soul's love and knowledge of God. But, unless the recollection of them produces good effects, let the memory never give them even passing attention. With regard to uncreated knowledge, I say that the soul should try to recall it as often as possible, for it will produce most beneficial effects. As we said above, it produces touches and impressions of union with God, which is the aim towards which we are directing the soul. And by no form, image or figure which can be impressed upon the soul does the memory recall these (for these touches and impressions of union with the Creator have no form), but only by the effects which they have produced upon it of light, love, joy and spiritual renewal, and so forth, some of which are wrought anew in the soul whensoever they are remembered.

## CHAPTER XV

*Which sets down the general method whereby the spiritual person must govern himself with respect to this sense.*

---

<sup>525</sup>Really the chapter is the twenty-sixth.

IN order to conclude this discussion on the memory, it will be well at this point to give the spiritual reader an account of the method which he must observe, and which is of universal application, in order that he may be united with God according to this sense. For, although what has been said makes the subject quite clear, it will nevertheless be more easily apprehended if we summarize it here. To this end it must be remembered that, since our aim is the union of the soul with God in hope, according to the memory, and since that which is hoped for is that which is not possessed, and since, the less we possess of other things, the greater scope and the greater capacity have we for hoping, and consequently the greater hope, therefore, the more things we possess, the less scope and capacity is there for hoping, and consequently the less hope have we. Hence, the more the soul dispossesses the memory of forms and things which may be recalled by it, which are not God, the more will it set its memory upon God, and the emptier will its memory become, so that it may hope for Him Who shall fill it. What must be done, then, that the soul may live in the perfect and pure hope of God is that, whensoever these distinct images, forms and ideas come to it, it must not rest in them, but must turn immediately to God, voiding the memory of them entirely, with loving affection. It must neither think of these things nor consider them beyond the degree which is necessary for the understanding and performing of its obligations, if they have any concern with these. And this it must do without setting any affection or inclination upon them, so that they may produce no effects in the soul. And thus a man must not fail to think and recall that which he ought to know and do, for, provided he preserves no affection or attachments, this will do him no harm. For this matter the lines of the Mount, which are in the thirteenth chapter of the first book, will be of profit.

2. But here it must be borne in mind that this doctrine ours does not agree, nor do we desire that it should agree, with the doctrine of those pestilent men, who, inspired by Satanic pride and envy, have desired to remove from the eyes of the faithful the holy and necessary use, and the worthy<sup>526</sup> adoration, of images of God and of the saints. This teaching of ours is very different from that; for we say not here, as they do, that images should not exist, and should not be adored; we simply explain the difference between images and God. We exhort men to pass beyond that which is superficial<sup>527</sup> that they may not be hindered from attaining to the living truth beneath it, and to make no more account of the former than suffices for attainment to the spiritual. For means are good and necessary to an end; and images are means which serve to remind us of God and of the saints. But when we consider and attend to the means more than is necessary for treating them as such, they disturb and hinder us as much, in their own way, as any different thing; the more so, when we treat of supernatural visions and images, to which I am specially referring, and with respect to which arise many deceptions and perils. For, with respect to the remembrance and adoration and esteem of images, which the Catholic Church sets before us, there can be no deception or peril, because naught is esteemed therein other than that which is represented; nor does the remembrance of them fail to profit the soul, since they are not preserved in the memory save with love for that which they represent; and, provided the soul pays no more heed to them than is necessary for this purpose, they will ever assist it to union with God, allowing the soul to soar upwards (when God grants it that favour) from the superficial

---

<sup>526</sup>[The Spanish word, *'nclita*, is stronger than this, meaning 'distinguished,' 'illustrious.']

<sup>527</sup>[*Lit.*, 'which is painted.']



image<sup>528</sup> to the living God, forgetting every creature and everything that belongs to creatures.

## CHAPTER XVI

*Which begins to treat of the dark night of the will. Makes a division between the affections of the will.*

WE should have accomplished nothing by the purgation of the understanding in order to ground it in the virtue of faith, and by the purgation of the memory in order to ground it in hope, if we purged not the will also according to the third virtue, which is charity, whereby the works that are done in faith live and have great merit, and without it are of no worth. For, as Saint James says: 'Without works of charity, faith is dead.'<sup>529</sup> And, now that we have to treat of the active detachment and night of this faculty, in order to form it and make it perfect in this virtue of the charity of God, I find no more fitting authority than that which is written in the sixth chapter of Deuteronomy, where Moses says: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and with thy whole soul and with thy whole strength.'<sup>530</sup> Herein is contained all that the spiritual man ought to do, and all that I have here to teach him, so that he may truly attain to God, through union of the will, by means of charity. For herein man is commanded to employ all the faculties and desires and operations and affections of his soul in God, so that all the ability and strength of his soul may serve for no more than this, according to that which David says, in these words: *Fortitudinem meam ad te custodiam*.<sup>531</sup>

2. The strength of the soul consists in its faculties, passions and desires, all of which are governed by the will. Now when these faculties, passions and desires are directed by the will toward God, and turned away from all that is not God, then the strength of the soul is kept for God, and thus the soul is able to love God with all its strength. And, to the end that the soul may do this, we shall here treat of the purgation from the will of all its unruly affections, whence arise unruly operations, affections and desires, and whence also arises its failure to keep all its strength for God. These affections and passions are four, namely: Joy, hope, grief and fear. These passions, when they are controlled by reason according to the way of God, so that the soul rejoices only in that which is purely the honour and glory of God, and hopes for naught else, neither grieves save for things that concern this, neither fears aught save God alone, it is clear that the strength and ability of the soul are being directed toward God and kept for Him. For, the more the soul rejoices in any other thing than God, the less completely will it centre its rejoicing in God;<sup>532</sup> and the more it hopes in aught else, the less will it hope in God; and so with the other passions.

3. And in order to give fuller instructions concerning this, we shall treat, in turn and in detail, as is our custom, of each of these four passions and of the desires of the will. For the whole business of attaining to union with God consists in purging the will

---

<sup>528</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the painted image.']

<sup>529</sup>St. James ii, 20.

<sup>530</sup>Deuteronomy vi, 5.

<sup>531</sup>Psalm lviii, 10 [A.V., lix, 9].

<sup>532</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the less strongly will its rejoicing be employed in God.']

from its affections and desires; so that thus it may no longer be a base, human will, but may become a Divine will, being made one<sup>533</sup> with the will of God.

4. These four passions have the greater dominion in the soul, and assail it the more vehemently, when the will is less strongly attached to God and more dependent on the creatures. For then it rejoices very readily at things that merit not rejoicing, hopes in that which brings no profit, grieves over that in which perchance it ought to rejoice, and fears where there is no reason for fearing.

5. From these affections, when they are unbridled, arise in the soul all the vices and imperfections which it possesses, and likewise, when they are ordered and composed, all its virtues. And it must be known that, if one of them should become ordered and controlled by reason, the rest will become so likewise; for these four passions of the soul are so closely and intimately united to one another that the actual direction of one is the virtual direction of the others; and if one be actually recollected the other three will virtually and proportionately be recollected likewise. For, if the will rejoice in anything it will as a result hope for the same thing to the extent of its rejoicing, and herein are virtually included grief and fear with regard to the same thing; and, in proportion as desire for these is taken away, fear and grief concerning them are likewise gradually lost, and hope for them is removed. For the will, with these four passions, is denoted by that figure which was seen by Ezechiel, of four beasts with one body, which had four faces; and the wings of the one were joined to those of the other, and each one went straight before his face, and when they went forward they turned not back.<sup>534</sup> And thus in the same manner the wings of each one of these affections are joined to those of each of the others, so that, in whichever direction one of them turns -- that is, in its operation -- the others of necessity go with it virtually also; and, when one of them descends, as is there said, they must all descend, and, when one is lifted up, they will all be lifted up. Where thy hope is, thither will go thy joy and fear and grief; and, if thy hope returns, the others will return, and so of the rest.

6. Wherefore thou must take note that, wheresoever one of these passions is, thither will go likewise the whole soul and the will and the other faculties, and they will all live as captives to this passion, and the other three passions will be living in it also, to afflict the soul with their captivity, and not to allow it to fly upward to the liberty and rest of sweet contemplation and union. For this cause Boetius told thee that, if thou shouldst desire to understand truth with clear light, thou must cast from thee joys, hope, fear and grief.<sup>535</sup> For, as long as these passions reign, they allow not the soul to remain in the tranquillity and peace which are necessary for the wisdom which, by natural or supernatural means, it is capable of receiving.

## CHAPTER XVII

*Which begins to treat of the first affections of the will. Describes the nature of joy and makes a distinction between the things in which the will can rejoice.*

THE first of the passions of the soul and affections of the will is joy, which, in so far as

---

<sup>533</sup>[The original is stronger: 'one same thing.']

<sup>534</sup>Ezechiel i, 5-9.

<sup>535</sup>Cf. Bk. III, ch. XVI, above.

concerns that which we propose to say about it, is naught else than a satisfaction of the will together with esteem for something which it considers desirable; for the will never rejoices save when an object affords it appreciation and satisfaction. This has reference to active joy, which arises when the soul clearly and distinctly understands the reason for its rejoicing, and when it is in its own power to rejoice or not. There is another and a passive joy, a condition in which the will may find itself rejoicing without understanding clearly and distinctly the reason for its rejoicing, and which also occurs at times when it does understand this; but it is not in the soul's power to rejoice or not. Of this condition we shall speak hereafter. For the present we shall speak of joy when it is active and voluntary and arises from things that are distinct and clear.

2. Joy may arise from six kinds of good things or blessings,<sup>536</sup> namely: temporal, natural, sensual, moral, supernatural and spiritual. Of these we shall speak in their order, controlling the will with regard to them so that it may not be encumbered by them and fail to place the strength of its joy in God. To this end it is well to presuppose one fundamental truth, which will be as a staff whereon we should ever lean as we progress; and it will be well to have understood it, because it is the light whereby we should be guided and whereby we may understand this doctrine, and direct our rejoicing in all these blessings to God. This truth is that the will must never rejoice save only in that which is to the honour and glory of God; and that the greatest honour we can show to Him is that of serving Him according to evangelical perfection; and anything that has naught to do with this is of no value and profit to man.

## CHAPTER XVIII

*Which treats of joy with respect to temporal blessings. Describes how joy in them must be directed to God.*

THE first kind of blessing of which we have spoken is temporal. And by temporal blessings we here understand riches, rank, office and other things that men desire; and children, relatives, marriages, etc.: all of which are things wherein the will may rejoice. But it is clear how vain a thing it is for men to rejoice in riches, titles, rank, office and other such things which they are wont to desire; for, if a man were the better servant of God for being rich, he ought to rejoice in riches; but in fact they are rather a cause for his giving offence to God, even as the Wise Man teaches, saying: 'Son, if thou be rich, thou shalt not be free from sin.'<sup>537</sup> Although it is true that temporal blessings do not necessarily of themselves cause sin, yet, through the frailty of its affections, the heart of man habitually clings to them and fails God (which is a sin, for to fail God is sin); it is for this cause that the Wise Man says: 'Thou shalt not be free from sin.' For this reason the Lord described riches, in the Gospel, as thorns,<sup>538</sup> in order to show that he who touches them<sup>539</sup> with the will shall be wounded by some sin. And that exclamation which He makes in the Gospel, saying: 'How hardly shall they that have riches enter the Kingdom

---

<sup>536</sup>[*Lit.*, 'things or blessings.' The word here translated 'blessings' is *bienes*, often rendered 'goods.' I use 'blessings' or 'good things' in the following chapters, according as best suits the context.]

<sup>537</sup>Ecclesiasticus xi, 10.

<sup>538</sup>St. Matthew xiii, 22; St. Luke viii, 14.

<sup>539</sup>[*Lit.*, 'handles them.']

of the heavens' -- that is to say, they that have joy in riches -- clearly shows that man must not rejoice in riches, since he exposes himself thereby to such great peril.<sup>540</sup> And David, in order to withdraw us from this peril, said likewise: 'If riches abound, set not your heart on them.'<sup>541</sup> And I will not here quote further testimony on so clear a matter.

2. For in that case I should never cease quoting Scripture, nor should I cease describing the evils which Solomon imputes to riches in Ecclesiastes. Solomon was a man who had possessed great riches, and, knowing well what they were, said: 'All things that are under the sun are vanity of vanities, vexation of spirit and vain solicitude of the mind.'<sup>542</sup> And he that loves riches, he said, shall reap no fruit from them.<sup>543</sup> And he adds that riches are kept to the hurt of their owner,<sup>544</sup> as we see in the Gospel, where it was said from Heaven to the man that rejoiced because he had kept many fruits for many years: 'Fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee to give account thereof, and whose shall be that which thou has provided?'<sup>545</sup> And finally, David teaches us the same, saying: 'Let us have no envy when our neighbour becomes rich, for it will profit him nothing in the life to come';<sup>546</sup> meaning thereby that we might rather have pity on him.

3. It follows, then, that a man must neither rejoice in riches when he has them, nor when his brother has them, unless they help them to serve God. For if ever it is allowable to rejoice in them, it will be when they are spent and employed in the service of God, for otherwise no profit will be derived from them. And the same is to be understood of other blessings (titles, offices, etc.), in all of which it is vain to rejoice if a man feel not that God is the better served because of them and the way to eternal life is made more secure. And as it cannot be clearly known if this is so (if God is better served, etc.), it would be a vain thing to rejoice in these things deliberately, since such a joy cannot be reasonable. For, as the Lord says: 'If a man gain all the world, he may yet lose his soul.'<sup>547</sup> There is naught, then, wherein to rejoice save in the fact that God is better served.

4. Neither is there cause for rejoicing in children because they are many, or rich, or endowed with natural graces and talents and the good things of fortune, but only if they serve God. For Absalom, the son of David, found neither his beauty nor his riches nor his lineage of any service to him because he served not God.<sup>548</sup> Hence it was a vain thing to have rejoiced in such a son. For this reason it is also a vain thing for men to desire to have children, as do some who trouble and disturb everyone with their desire for them, since they know not if such children will be good and serve God. Nor do they know if their satisfaction in them will be turned into pain; nor if the comfort and consolation which they should have from them will change to disquiet and trial; and the honour which they should bring them, into dishonour; nor if they will cause them to give greater offence to God, as happens to many. Of these Christ says that they go round

---

<sup>540</sup>St. Matthew xix, 23; St. Luke xviii, 24.

<sup>541</sup>Psalms lxi, 11 [A.V., lxii, 10].

<sup>542</sup>Ecclesiastes i, 14.

<sup>543</sup>Ecclesiastes v, 9.

<sup>544</sup>Ecclesiastes v, 12.

<sup>545</sup>St. Luke xii, 20.

<sup>546</sup>Psalms xlviii, 17-18 [A.V., xlix, 16-17].

<sup>547</sup>St. Matthew xvi, 26.

<sup>548</sup>2 Kings [A.V. 2 Samuel] xiv, 25.

about the sea and the land to enrich them and to make them doubly the children of perdition which they are themselves.<sup>549</sup>

5. Wherefore, though all things smile upon a man and all that he does turns out prosperously, he ought to have misgivings rather than to rejoice; for these things increase the occasion and peril of his forgetting God. For this cause Solomon says, in Ecclesiastes, that he was cautious: 'Laughter I counted error and to rejoicing I said, "Why art thou vainly deceived?"'<sup>550</sup> Which is as though he had said: When things smiled upon me I counted it error and deception to rejoice in them; for without doubt it is a great error and folly on the part of a man if he rejoice when things are bright and pleasant for him, knowing not of a certainty that there will come to him thence some eternal good. The heart of the fool, says the Wise Man, is where there is mirth, but that of the wise man is where there is sorrow.<sup>551</sup> For mirth blinds the heart and allows it not to consider things and ponder them; but sadness makes a man open his eyes and look at the profit and the harm of them. And hence it is that, as he himself says, anger is better than laughter.<sup>552</sup> Wherefore it is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting; for in the former is figured the end of all men,<sup>553</sup> as the Wise Man says likewise.

6. It would therefore be vanity for a woman or her husband to rejoice in their marriage when they know not clearly that they are serving God better thereby. They ought rather to feel confounded, since matrimony is a cause, as Saint Paul says, whereby each one sets his heart upon the other and keeps it not wholly with God. Wherefore he says: 'If thou shouldst find thyself free from a wife, desire not to seek a wife; while he that has one already should walk with such freedom of heart as though he had her not.'<sup>554</sup> This, together with what we have said concerning temporal blessings, he teaches us himself, in these words: 'This is certain; as I say to you, brethren, the time is short; it remaineth that they also who have wives be as if they had none; and they that weep, as them that weep not; and they that rejoice, as them that rejoice not; and they that buy, as them that possess not; and they that use this world, as them that use it not.'<sup>555</sup> All this he says to show us that we must not set our rejoicings upon any other thing than that which tends to the service of God, since the rest is vanity and a thing which profits not; for joy that is not according to God can bring the soul no profit.<sup>556</sup>

## CHAPTER XIX

*Of the evils that may befall the soul when it sets its rejoicing upon temporal blessings.*

IF we had to describe the evils which encompass the soul when it sets the affections of its will upon temporal blessings, neither ink nor paper would suffice us and our time

---

<sup>549</sup>St. Matthew xxiii, 15.

<sup>550</sup>Ecclesiastes ii, 2.

<sup>551</sup>Ecclesiastes vii, 5.

<sup>552</sup>Ecclesiastes vii, 4.

<sup>553</sup>Ecclesiastes vii, 3.

<sup>554</sup>1 Corinthians vii, 27.

<sup>555</sup>1 Corinthians vii, 29-30.

<sup>556</sup>[*Lit.*, 'bring it no profit.']

would be too short. For from very small beginnings a man may attain to great evils and destroy great blessings; even as from a spark of fire, if it be not quenched, may be enkindled great fires which set the world ablaze. All these evils have their root and origin in one important evil of a privative kind that is contained in this joy -- namely, withdrawal from God. For even as, in the soul that is united with Him by the affection of its will, there are born all blessings, even so, when it withdraws itself from Him because of this creature affection, there beset it all evils and disasters proportionately to the joy and affection wherewith it is united with the creature; for this is inherent in<sup>557</sup> withdrawal from God. Wherefore a soul may expect the evils which assail it to be greater or less according to the greater or lesser degree of its withdrawal from God. These evils may be extensive or intensive; for the most part they are both together.

2. This privative evil, whence, we say, arise other privative and positive evils, has four degrees, each one worse than the other. And, when the soul compasses the fourth degree, it will have compassed all the evils and depravities that arise in this connection.<sup>558</sup> These four degrees are well indicated by Moses in Deuteronomy in these words, where he says: 'The beloved grew fat and kicked. He grew fat and became swollen and gross. He forsook God his Maker and departed from God his Salvation.'<sup>559</sup>

3. This growing fat of the soul, which was loved before it grew fat, indicates absorption in this joy of creatures. And hence arises the first degree of this evil, namely the going backward; which is a certain blunting of the mind with regard to God, an obscuring of the blessings of God like the obscuring of the air by mist, so that it cannot be clearly illumined by the light of the sun. For, precisely when the spiritual person sets his rejoicing upon anything, and gives rein to his desire for foolish things, he becomes blind as to God, and the simple intelligence of his judgment becomes clouded, even as the Divine Spirit teaches in the Book of Wisdom, saying: 'the use and association of vanity and scorn obscureth good things, and inconstancy of desire overturneth and perverteth the sense and judgment that are without malice.'<sup>560</sup> Here the Holy Spirit shows that, although there be no malice conceived in the understanding of the soul, concupiscence and rejoicing in creatures suffice of themselves to create in the soul the first degree of this evil, which is the blunting of the mind and the darkening of the judgment, by which the truth is understood and each thing honestly judged as it is.

4. Holiness and good judgment suffice not to save a man from falling into this evil, if he gives way to concupiscence or rejoicing in temporal things. For this reason God warned us by uttering these words through Moses: 'Thou shalt take no gifts, which blind even the prudent.'<sup>561</sup> And this was addressed particularly to those who were to be judges; for these have need to keep their judgment clear and alert, which they will be unable to do if they covet and rejoice in gifts. And for this cause likewise God commanded Moses to appoint judges from those who abhorred avarice, so that their judgment should not be blunted with the lust of the passions.<sup>562</sup> And thus he says not only that they should not desire it, but that they should abhor it. For, if a man is to be perfectly defended from the affection of love, he must preserve an abhorrence of it,

---

<sup>557</sup>[*Lit.*, 'for this is.']

<sup>558</sup>[*Lit.*, 'that can be told in this case.']

<sup>559</sup>Deuteronomy xxxii, 15.

<sup>560</sup>Wisdom iv, 12.

<sup>561</sup>Exodus xxiii, 8.

<sup>562</sup>Exodus xxiii, 21-2.

defending himself by means of the one thing against its contrary. The reason why the prophet Samuel, for example, was always so upright and enlightened a judge is that (as he said in the Book of the Kings) he had never received a gift from any man.<sup>563</sup>

5. The second degree of this privative evil arises from the first, which is indicated in the words following the passage already quoted, namely: 'He grew fat and became swollen and gross.'<sup>564</sup> And thus this second degree is dilation of the will through the acquisition of greater liberty in temporal things; which consists in no longer attaching so much importance to them, nor troubling oneself about them, nor esteeming so highly the joy and pleasure that come from created blessings. And this will have arisen in the soul from its having in the first place given rein to rejoicing; for, through giving way to it, the soul has become swollen with it, as is said in that passage, and that fatness of rejoicing and desire has moved it to dilate and extend its will more freely toward the creatures. And this brings with it great evils. For this second degree causes the soul to withdraw itself from the things of God, and from holy practices, and to take no pleasure in them, because it takes pleasure in other things and devotes itself continually to many imperfections and follies and to joys and vain pleasures.

6. And when this second degree is consummated, it withdraws a man wholly from the practices which he followed continually and makes his whole mind and covetousness to be given to secular things. And those who are affected by this second degree not only have their judgment and understanding darkened so that they cannot recognize truth and justice, like those who are in the first degree, but they are also very weak and lukewarm and careless in acquiring knowledge of, and in practising, truth and justice, even as Isaiah says of them in these words: 'They all love gifts and allow themselves to be carried away by rewards, and they judge not the orphan, neither doth the cause of the widow come unto them that they may give heed to it.'<sup>565</sup> This comes not to pass in them without sin, especially when to do these things is incumbent upon them because of their office. For those who are affected by this degree are not free from malice as are those of the first degree. And thus they withdraw themselves more and more from justice and virtues, since their will reaches out more and more in affection for creatures. Wherefore, the characteristics of those who are in this second degree are great lukewarmness in spiritual things and failure to do their duty by them; they practise them from formality or from compulsion or from the habit which they have formed of practising them, rather than because they love them.

7. The third degree of this privative evil is a complete falling away from God, neglect to fulfil His law in order not to lose worldly things and blessings, and relapse into mortal sin through covetousness. And this third degree is described in the words following the passage quoted above, which says: 'He forsook God his Maker.'<sup>566</sup> In this degree are included all who have the faculties of the soul absorbed in things of the world and in riches and commerce, in such a way that they care nothing for fulfilling the obligations of the law of God. And they are very forgetful and dull with respect to that which touches their salvation, and have a correspondingly greater ardour and shrewdness with respect to things of the world. So much so that in the Gospel Christ calls them children of this world, and says of them that they are more prudent and acute

---

<sup>563</sup>1 Kings [A.V., 1 Samuel] xii, 3.

<sup>564</sup>Deuteronomy xxxii, 15.

<sup>565</sup>Isaiah i, 23.

<sup>566</sup>Deuteronomy xxxii, 15.

in their affairs than are the children of light in their own.<sup>567</sup> And thus they are as nothing in God's business, whereas in the world's business they are everything. And these are the truly avaricious, who have extended and dispersed their desire and joy on things created, and this with such affection that they cannot be satisfied; on the contrary, their desire and their thirst grow all the more because they are farther withdrawn from the only source that could satisfy them, which is God. For it is of these that God Himself speaks through Jeremias, saying: 'They have forsaken Me, Who am the fountain of living water, and they have digged to themselves broken cisterns that can hold no water.'<sup>568</sup> And this is the reason why the covetous man finds naught among the creatures wherewith he can quench his thirst, but only that which increases it. These persons are they that fall into countless kinds of sin through love of temporal blessings and the evils which afflict them are innumerable. And of these David says: *Transierunt in affectum cordis*.<sup>569</sup>

8. The fourth degree of this privative evil is indicated in the last words of our passage, which says: 'And he departed from God his Salvation.'<sup>570</sup> To this degree come those of the third degree whereof we have just spoken. For, through his not giving heed to setting his heart upon the law of God because of temporal blessings, the soul of the covetous man departs far from God according to his memory, understanding and will, forgetting Him as though He were not his God, which comes to pass because he has made for himself a god of money and of temporal blessings, as Saint Paul says when he describes avarice as slavery to idols.<sup>571</sup> For this fourth degree leads a man as far as to forget God, and to set his heart, which he should have set formally upon God, formally upon money, as though he had no god beside.

9. To this fourth degree belong those who hesitate not to subject Divine and supernatural things to temporal things, as to their God, when they ought to do the contrary, and subject temporal things to God, if they considered Him as their God, as would be in accordance with reason. To these belonged the iniquitous Balaam, who sold the grace that God had given to him.<sup>572</sup> And also Simon Magus, who thought to value the grace of God in terms of money, and desired to buy it.<sup>573</sup> In doing this he showed a greater esteem for money; and he thought there were those who similarly esteemed it, and would give grace for money. There are many nowadays who in many other ways belong to this fourth degree; their reason is darkened to spiritual things by covetousness; they serve money and not God, and are influenced by money and not by God, putting first the cost of a thing and not its Divine worth and reward, and in many ways making money their principal god and end, and setting it before the final end, which is God.

10. To this last degree belong also those miserable souls who are so greatly in love with their own goods that they take them for their god, so much so that they scruple not to sacrifice their lives for them, when they see that this god of theirs is suffering some temporal harm. They abandon themselves to despair and take their own lives for

---

<sup>567</sup>St. Luke xvi, 8.

<sup>568</sup>Jeremias ii, 13.

<sup>569</sup>['They have passed into the affection of the heart.'] Psalm lxxii, 7 [A.V. lxxiii, 7].

<sup>570</sup>Deuteronomy xxxii, 15.

<sup>571</sup>Colossians iii, 5.

<sup>572</sup>Numbers xxii, 7.

<sup>573</sup>Acts viii, 18-19.



their miserable ends, showing by their own acts how wretched is the reward which such a god as theirs bestows. For when they can no longer hope for aught from him he gives them despair and death; and those whom he pursues not to this last evil of death he condemns to a dying life in the griefs of anxiety and in many other miseries, allowing no mirth to enter their heart, and naught that is of earth to bring them satisfaction. They continually pay the tribute of their heart to money by their yearning for it and hoarding of it for the final calamity of their just perdition, as the Wise Man warns them, saying: 'Riches are kept to the hurt of their owner.'<sup>574</sup>

11. And to this fourth degree belong those of whom Saint Paul says: *Tradidit illos in reprobum sensum*.<sup>575</sup> For joy, when it strives after possessions as its final goal, drags man down to these evils. But those on whom it inflicts lesser evils are also to be sorely pitied, since, as we have said, their souls are driven far backward upon the way of God. Wherefore, as David says: Be not thou afraid when a man shall be made rich: that is, envy him not, thinking that he outstrips thee, for, when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away, neither shall his glory nor his joy descend with him.<sup>576</sup>

## CHAPTER XX

*Of the benefits that come to the soul from its withdrawal of joy from temporal things.*

THE spiritual man, then, must look carefully to it that his heart and his rejoicing begin not to lay hold upon temporal things; he must fear lest from being little it should grow to be great, and should increase from one degree to another. For little things, in time, become great; and from a small beginning there comes in the end a great matter, even as a spark suffices to set a mountain on fire and to burn up the whole world. And let him never be self-confident because his attachment is small, and fail to uproot it instantly because he thinks that he will do so later. For if, when it is so small and in its beginnings, he has not the courage to make an end of it, how does he suppose, and presume, that he will be able to do so when it is great and more deeply rooted. The more so since Our Lord said in the Gospel: 'He that is unfaithful in little will be unfaithful also in much.'<sup>577</sup> For he that avoids the small sin will not fall into the great sin; but great evil is inherent in the small sin,<sup>578</sup> since it has already penetrated within the fence and wall of the heart; and as the proverb says: Once begun, half done. Wherefore David warns us, saying: 'Though riches abound, let us not apply our heart to them.'<sup>579</sup>

2. Although a man might not do this for the sake of God and of the obligations of Christian perfection, he should nevertheless do it because of the temporal advantages that result from it, to say nothing of the spiritual advantages, and he should free his heart completely from all rejoicing in the things mentioned above. And thus, not only will he free himself from the pestilent evils which we have described in the last chapter, but, in addition to this, he will withdraw his joy from temporal blessings and acquire the virtue

---

<sup>574</sup>Ecclesiastes v, 11-12.

<sup>575</sup>['He delivered them up to a reprobate sense.'] Romans i, 28.

<sup>576</sup>Psalms xlvi, 17-18 [A.V., xlix, 16-17].

<sup>577</sup>St. Luke xvi, 10.

<sup>578</sup>[The word 'sin' is not in the original of this sentence, which reads 'the small . . . the great . . .' etc.]

<sup>579</sup>Psalms lxi, 11 [A.V., lxii, 10].

of liberality, which is one of the principal attributes of God, and can in no wise coexist with covetousness. Apart from this, he will acquire liberty of soul, clarity of reason, rest, tranquillity and peaceful confidence in God and a true reverence and worship of God which comes from the will. He will find greater joy and recreation in the creatures through his detachment from them, for he cannot rejoice in them if he look upon them with attachment to them as to his own. Attachment is an anxiety that, like a bond, ties the spirit down to the earth and allows it no enlargement of heart. He will also acquire, in his detachment from things, a clear conception of them, so that he can well understand the truths relating to them, both naturally and supernaturally. He will therefore enjoy them very differently from one who is attached to them, and he will have a great advantage and superiority over such a one. For, while he enjoys them according to their truth, the other enjoys them according to their falseness; the one appreciates the best side of them and the other the worst; the one rejoices in their substance; the other, whose sense is bound to them, in their accident. For sense cannot grasp or attain to more than the accident, but the spirit, purged of the clouds and species of accident, penetrates the truth and worth of things, for this is its object. Wherefore joy, like a cloud, darkens the judgment, since there can be no voluntary joy in creatures without voluntary attachment, even as there can be no joy which is passion when there is no habitual attachment in the heart; and the renunciation and purgation of such joy leave the judgment clear, even as the mists leave the air clear when they are scattered.

3. This man, then, rejoices in all things -- since his joy is dependent upon none of them -- as if he had them all; and this other, through looking upon them with a particular sense of ownership, loses in a general sense all the pleasure of them all. This former man, having none of them in his heart, possesses them all, as Saint Paul says, in great freedom.<sup>580</sup> This latter man, inasmuch as he has something of them through the attachment of his will, neither has nor possesses anything; it is rather they that have possessed his heart, and he is, as it were, a sorrowing captive. Wherefore, if he desire to have a certain degree of joy in creatures, he must of necessity have an equal degree of disquietude and grief in his heart, since it is seized and possessed by them. But he that is detached is untroubled by anxieties, either in prayer or apart from it; and thus, without losing time, he readily gains great spiritual treasure. But the other man loses everything, running to and fro upon the chain by which his heart is attached and bound; and with all his diligence he can still hardly free himself for a short time from this bond of thought and rejoicing by which his heart is bound. The spiritual man, then, must restrain the first motion of his heart towards creatures, remembering the premiss which we have here laid down, that there is naught wherein a man must rejoice, save in his service of God, and in his striving for His glory and honour in all things, directing all things solely to this end and turning aside from vanity in them, looking in them neither for his own joy nor for his consolation.

4. There is another very great and important benefit in this detachment of the rejoicing from creatures -- namely, that it leaves the heart free for God. This is the dispositive foundation of all the favours which God will grant to the soul, and without this disposition He grants them not. And they are such that, even from the temporal standpoint, for one joy which the soul renounces for love of Him and for the perfection of the Gospel, He will give him a hundred in this life, as His Majesty promises in the same

---

<sup>580</sup>2 Corinthians vi, 10.

Gospel.<sup>581</sup> But, even were there not so high a rate of interest, the spiritual man should quench these creature joys in his soul because of the displeasure which they give to God. For we see in the Gospel that, simply because that rich man rejoiced at having laid up for many years, God was so greatly angered that He told him that his soul would be brought to account on that same night.<sup>582</sup> Therefore, we must believe that, whensoever we rejoice vainly, God is beholding us and preparing some punishment and bitter draught according to our deserts, so that the pain which results from the joy may sometimes be a hundred times greater than the joy. For, although it is true, as Saint John says on this matter, in the Apocalypse, concerning Babylon, that as much as she had rejoiced and lived in delights, so much torment and sorrow should be given her,<sup>583</sup> yet this is not to say that the pain will not be greater than the joy, which indeed it will be, since for brief pleasures are given eternal torments. The words mean that there shall be nothing without its particular punishment, for He Who will punish the idle word will not pardon vain rejoicing.

## CHAPTER XXI

*Which describes how it is vanity to set the rejoicing of the will upon the good things of nature, and how the soul must direct itself, by means of them, to God.*

BY natural blessings we here understand beauty, grace, comeliness, bodily constitution and all other bodily endowments; and likewise, in the soul, good understanding, discretion and other things that pertain to reason. Many a man sets his rejoicing upon all these gifts, to the end that he himself, or those that belong to him, may possess them, and for no other reason, and gives no thanks to God Who bestows them on him so that He may be better known and loved by him because of them. But to rejoice for this cause alone is vanity and deception, as Solomon says in these words: 'Deceitful is grace and vain is beauty; the woman who fears God, she shall be praised.'<sup>584</sup> Here he teaches us that a man ought rather to be fearful because of these natural gifts, since he may easily be distracted by them from the love of God, and, if he be attracted by them, he may fall into vanity and be deceived. For this reason bodily grace is said to be deceptive because it deceives a man in the ways and attracts him to that which beseems him not, through vain joy and complacency, either in himself or in others that have such grace. And it is said that beauty is vain because it causes a man to fall in many ways when he esteems it and rejoices in it, for he should rejoice only if he serves God or others through it. But he ought rather to fear and harbour misgivings lest perchance his natural graces and gifts should be a cause of his offending God, either by his vain presumption or by the extreme affection with which he regards them. Wherefore he that has such gifts should be cautious and live carefully, lest, by his vain ostentation, he give cause to any man to withdraw his heart in the smallest degree from God. For these graces and gifts of nature are so full of provocation and occasion of evil, both to him that possesses them and to him that looks upon them, that there is hardly any who entirely escapes

---

<sup>581</sup>St. Matthew xix, 29.

<sup>582</sup>St. Luke xii, 20.

<sup>583</sup>Apocalypse xviii, 7.

<sup>584</sup>Proverbs xxxi, 30.

from binding and entangling his heart in them. We have heard that many spiritual persons, who had certain of these gifts, had such fear of this that they prayed God to disfigure them, lest they should be a cause and occasion of any vain joy or affection to themselves or to others, and God granted their prayer.

2. The spiritual man, then, must purge his will, and make it to be blind to this vain rejoicing, bearing in mind that beauty and all other natural gifts are but earth, and that they come from the earth and will return thither; and that grace and beauty are the smoke and vapour belonging to this same earth; and that they must be held and esteemed as such by any man who desires not to fall into vanity, but will direct his heart to God in these matters, with rejoicing and gladness, because God is in Himself all these beauties and graces in the most eminent degree, and is infinitely high above all created things. And, as David says, they are all like a garment and shall grow old and pass away, and He alone remains immutable for ever.<sup>585</sup> Wherefore, if in all these matters a man direct not his rejoicing to God, it will ever be false and deceptive. For of such a man is that saying of Solomon to be understood, where he addresses joy in the creatures, saying: 'To joy I said: "Why art thou vainly deceived?"'<sup>586</sup> That is, when the heart allows itself to be attracted by the creatures.

## CHAPTER XXII

*Of the evils which come to the soul when it sets the rejoicing of its will upon the good things of nature.*

ALTHOUGH many of these evils and benefits that I am describing in treating of these kinds of joy are common to all, yet, because they follow directly from joy and detachment from joy (although comprised under any one of these six divisions which I am treating), therefore I speak under each heading of some evils and benefits which are also found under another, since these, as I say, are connected with that joy which belongs to them all. But my principal intent is to speak of the particular evils and benefits which come to the soul, with respect to each thing, through its rejoicing or not rejoicing in it. These I call particular evils, because they are primarily and immediately caused by one particular kind of rejoicing, and are not, save in a secondary and mediate sense, caused by another. The evil of spiritual lukewarmness, for example, is caused directly by any and every kind of joy, and this evil is therefore common to all these six kinds; but fornication is a particular evil, which is the direct result only of joy in the good things of nature of which we are speaking.

2. The spiritual and bodily evils, then, which directly and effectively come to the soul when it sets its rejoicing on the good things of nature are reduced to six principal evils. The first is vainglory, presumption, pride and disesteem of our neighbour; for a man cannot cast eyes of esteem on one thing without taking them from the rest. From this follows, at the least, a real disesteem for everything else; for naturally, by setting our esteem on one thing, we withdraw our heart from all things else and set it upon the thing esteemed; and from this real contempt it is very easy to fall into an intentional and voluntary contempt for all these other things, in particular or in general, not only in the

---

<sup>585</sup>Psalm ci, 27 [A.V., cii, 26-7].

<sup>586</sup>Ecclesiastes ii, 2.

heart, but also in speech, when we say that such a thing or such a person is not like such another. The second evil is the moving of the senses to complacency and sensual delight and lust. The third evil comes from falling into adulation and vain praise, wherein is deception and vanity, as Isaias says in these words: 'My people, he that praises thee deceives thee.'<sup>587</sup> And the reason is that, although we sometimes speak the truth when we praise grace and beauty, yet it will be a marvel if there is not some evil enwrapped therein or if the person praised is not plunged into vain complacency and rejoicing, or his imperfect intentions and affections are not directed thereto. The fourth evil is of a general kind: it is a serious<sup>588</sup> blunting of the reason and the spiritual sense, such as is effected by rejoicing in temporal good things. In one way, indeed, it is much worse. For as the good things of nature are more closely connected with man than are temporal good things, the joy which they give leaves an impression and effect and trace upon the senses more readily and more effectively, and deadens them more completely. And thus reason and judgment are not free, but are clouded with that affection of joy which is very closely connected with them; and from this arises the fifth evil, which is distraction of the mind by created things. And hence arise and follow lukewarmness and weakness of spirit, which is the sixth evil, and is likewise of a general kind; this is apt to reach such a pitch that a man may find the things of God very tedious and troublesome, and at last even come to abhor them. In this rejoicing purity of spirit is invariably lost -- at least, in its essence. For, if any spirituality is discerned, it will be of such a gross and sensual kind as to be hardly spiritual or interior or recollected at all, since it will consist rather in pleasure of sense than in strength of spirit. Since, then, the spirituality of the soul is of so low and weak a character at that time as not to quench the habit of this rejoicing (for this habit alone suffices to destroy pure spirituality, even when the soul is not consenting to the acts of rejoicing), the soul must be living, so to say, in the weakness of sense rather than in the strength of the spirit. Otherwise, it will be seen in the perfection and fortitude which the soul will have when the occasion demands it. Although I do not deny that many virtues may exist together with serious imperfections, no pure or delectable inward spirituality can exist while these joys are not quenched; for the flesh reigns within, warring against the spirit, and, although the spirit may be unconscious of the evil, yet at the least it causes it secret distraction.

3. Returning now to speak of that second evil, which contains within itself innumerable other evils, it is impossible to describe with the pen or to express in words the lengths to which it can go, but this is not unknown or secret, nor is the extent of the misery that arises from the setting of our rejoicing on natural beauty and graces. For every day we hear of its causing numerous deaths, the loss by many of their honour, the commission of many insults, the dissipation of much wealth, numerous cases of emulation and strife, of adultery, rape and fornication, and of the fall of many holy men, comparable in number to that third part of the stars of Heaven which was swept down by the tail of the serpent on earth.<sup>589</sup> The fine gold has lost its brilliance and lustre and is become mire; and the notable and noble men of Sion, who were clothed in finest gold, are counted as earthen pitchers that are broken and have become potsherds.<sup>590</sup> How far does the poison of this evil not penetrate?

---

<sup>587</sup>Isaias iii, 12.

<sup>588</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the great.']

<sup>589</sup>Apocalypse xii, 4.

<sup>590</sup>Lamentations iv, 1-2.

4. And who drinks not, either little or much, from this golden chalice of the Babylonian woman of the Apocalypse?<sup>591</sup> She seats herself on that great beast, that had seven heads and ten crowns, signifying that there is scarce any man, whether high or low, saint or sinner, who comes not to drink of her wine, to some extent enslaving his heart thereby, for, as is said of her in that place, all the kings of the earth have become drunken with the wine of her prostitution. And she seizes upon all estates of men, even upon the highest and noblest estate -- the service of the sanctuary and the Divine priesthood -- setting her abominable cup, as Daniel says, in the holy place,<sup>592</sup> and leaving scarcely a single strong man without making him to drink, either little or much, from the wine of this chalice, which is vain rejoicing. For this reason it is said that all the kings of the earth have become drunken with this wine, for very few will be found, however holy they may have been, that have not been to some extent stupefied and bewildered by this draught of the joy and pleasure of natural graces and beauty.

5. This phrase 'have become drunken' should be noted. For, however little a man may drink of the wine of this rejoicing, it at once takes hold upon the heart, and stupefies it and works the evil of darkening the reason, as does wine to those who have been corrupted by it. So that, if some antidote be not at once taken against this poison, whereby it may be quickly expelled, the life of the soul is endangered. Its spiritual weakness will increase, bringing it to such a pass that it will be like Samson, when his eyes were put out and the hair of his first strength was cut off, and like Samson it will see itself grinding in the mills, a captive among its enemies;<sup>593</sup> and afterwards, peradventure, it will die the second death among its enemies, even as did he, since the drinking of this rejoicing will produce in them spiritually all those evils that were produced in him physically, and does in fact produce them in many persons to this day. Let his enemies come and say to him afterwards, to his great confusion: Art thou he that broke the knotted cords, that tore asunder the lions, slew the thousand Philistines, broke down the gates and freed himself from all his enemies?

6. Let us conclude, then, by giving the instruction necessary to counteract this poison. And let it be this: As soon as thy heart feels moved by this vain joy in the good things of nature, let it remember how vain a thing it is to rejoice in aught save the service of God, how perilous and how pernicious. Let it consider how great an evil it was for the angels to rejoice and take pleasure in their natural endowments and beauty, since it was this that plunged them into the depths of shame.<sup>594</sup> Let them think, too, how many evils come to men daily through this same vanity, and let them therefore resolve in good time to employ the remedy which the poet commends to those who begin to grow affectioned to such things. 'Make haste now,' he says, 'and use the remedy at the beginning; for when evil things have had time to grow in the heart, remedy and medicine come late.' Look not upon the wine, as the Wise Man says, when its colour is red and when it shines in the glass; it enters pleasantly and bites like a viper and sheds abroad poison like a basilisk.<sup>595</sup>

---

<sup>591</sup>Apocalypse xvii, 3-4.

<sup>592</sup>Daniel ix, 27.

<sup>593</sup>Judges xvi.

<sup>594</sup>[*Lit.*, 'since it was through this they fell into the vile abysses.']

<sup>595</sup>Proverbs xxiii, 31-2.

## CHAPTER XXIII

*Of the benefits which the soul receives from not setting its rejoicing upon the good things of nature.*

MANY are the benefits which come to the soul through the withdrawal of its heart from this rejoicing; for, besides preparing itself for the love of God and the other virtues, it makes a direct way for its own humility, and for a general charity toward its neighbours. For, as it is not led by the apparent good things of nature, which are deceitful, into affection for anyone, the soul remains free and able<sup>596</sup> to love them all rationally and spiritually, as God wills them to be loved. Here it must be understood that none deserves to be loved, save for the virtue that is in him. And, when we love in this way, it is very pleasing to the will of God, and also brings great freedom; and if there be attachment in it, there is greater attachment to God. For, in that case, the more this love grows, the more grows our love toward God; and, the more grows our love toward God, the greater becomes our love for our neighbour. For, when love is grounded in God, the reason for all love is one and the same and the cause of all love is one and the same also.

2. Another excellent benefit comes to the soul from its renunciation of this kind of rejoicing, which is that it fulfils and keeps the counsel of Our Saviour which He gives us through Saint Matthew. 'Let him that will follow Me', He says, 'deny himself.'<sup>597</sup> This the soul could in no wise do if it were to set its rejoicing upon the good things of nature; for he that makes any account of himself neither denies himself nor follows Christ.

3. There is another great benefit in the renunciation of this kind of rejoicing, which is that it produces great tranquillity in the soul, empties it of distractions and brings recollection to the senses, especially to the eyes. For the soul that desires not to rejoice in these things desires neither to look at them nor to attach the other senses to them, lest it should be attracted or entangled by them. Nor will it spend time or thought upon them, being like the prudent serpent, which stops its ears that it may not hear the charmers lest they make some impression upon it.<sup>598</sup> For, by guarding its doors, which are the senses, the soul guards itself safely and increases its tranquillity and purity.

4. There is another benefit of no less importance to those that have become proficient in the mortification of this kind of rejoicing, which is that evil things and the knowledge of them neither make an impression upon them nor stain them as they do those to whom they still give any delight. Wherefore the renunciation and mortification of this rejoicing result in spiritual cleanness of soul and body; that is, of spirit and sense; and the soul comes to have an angelical conformity with God, and becomes, both in spirit and in body, a worthy temple of the Holy Spirit. This cannot come to pass if the heart rejoices in natural graces and good things. For this reason it is not necessary to have given consent to any evil thing, or to have remembrance of such; for that rejoicing suffices to stain the soul and the senses with impurity by means of the knowledge of evil; for, as the Wise Man says, the Holy Spirit will remove Himself from thoughts that are without understanding -- that is, without the higher reason that has respect to

---

<sup>596</sup>[*Lit.*, 'free and clear.']

<sup>597</sup>St. Matthew xvi, 24.

<sup>598</sup>Psalms lvi, 5 [A.V., lviii, 4-5].

God.<sup>599</sup>

5. Another benefit of a general kind follows, which is that, besides freeing ourselves from the evils and dangers aforementioned, we are delivered also from countless vanities, and from many other evils, both spiritual and temporal; and especially from falling into the small esteem in which are held all those that are seen to glory or rejoice in the said natural gifts, whether in their own or in those of others. And thus these souls are held and esteemed as wise and prudent, as indeed are all those who take no account of these things, but only of that which pleases God.

6. From these said benefits follows the last, which is a generosity of the soul, as necessary to the service of God as is liberty of spirit, whereby temptations are easily vanquished and trials faithfully endured, and whereby, too, the virtues grow and become prosperous.

## CHAPTER XXIV

*Which treats of the third kind of good thing whereon the will may set the affection of rejoicing, which kind pertains to sense. Indicates what these good things are and of how many kinds, and how the will has to be directed to God and purged of this rejoicing.*

WE have next to treat of rejoicing with respect to the good things of sense, which is the third kind of good thing wherein we said that the will may rejoice. And it is to be noted that by the good things of sense we here understand everything in this life that can be apprehended by the senses of sight, hearing, smell, taste or touch, and by the interior fashioning of imaginary reflections, all of which things belong to the bodily senses, interior and exterior.

2. And, in order to darken the will and purge it of rejoicing with respect to these sensible objects, and direct it to God by means of them, it is necessary to assume one truth, which is that, as we have frequently said, the sense of the lower part of man which is that whereof we are treating, is not, neither can be, capable of knowing or understanding God as God is. So that the eye cannot see Him, or aught that is like Him; neither can the ear hear His voice, or any sound that resembles it; neither can the sense of smell perceive a perfume so sweet as He; neither can the taste detect a savour so sublime and delectable; neither can the touch feel a movement so delicate and full of delight, nor aught like to it; neither can His form or any figure that represents Him enter into the thought or imagination. Even as says Isaias: 'Eye hath not seen Him, nor hath ear heard Him, neither hath it entered into the heart of man.'<sup>600</sup>

3. And here it must be noted that the senses may receive pleasure and delight, either from the spirit, by means of some communication that it receives from God interiorly, or from outward things communicated to them. And, as has been said, neither by way of the spirit nor by that of sense can the sensual part of the soul know God. For, since it has no capacity for attaining to such a point, it receives in the senses both that which is of the spirit and that which is of sense, and receives them in no other way. Wherefore it would be at the least but vanity to set the rejoicing of the will upon pleasure caused by any of these apprehensions, and it would be hindering the power of the will

---

<sup>599</sup>Wisdom i, 5.

<sup>600</sup>Isaias lxiv, 4; 1 Corinthians ii, 9.



from occupying itself with God and from setting its rejoicing upon Him alone. This the soul cannot perfectly accomplish, save by purging itself and remaining in darkness as to rejoicing of this kind, as also with respect to other things.

4. I said advisedly that if the rejoicing of the will were to rest in any of these things it would be vanity. But, when it does not rest upon them, but, as soon as the will finds pleasure in that which it hears, sees and does, soars upward to rejoice in God -- so that its pleasure acts as a motive and strengthens it to that end -- this is very good. In such a case not only need the said motions not be shunned when they cause this devotion and prayer, but the soul may profit by them, and indeed should so profit, to the end that it may accomplish this holy exercise. For there are souls who are greatly moved by objects of sense to seek God. But much circumspection must be observed herein and the resulting effects must be considered; for oftentimes many spiritual persons indulge in the recreations of sense aforementioned under the pretext of offering prayer and devotion to God; and they do this in a way which must be described as recreation rather than prayer, and which gives more pleasure to themselves than to God. And, although the intention that they have is toward God, the effect which they produce is that of recreation of sense, wherein they find weakness and imperfection, rather than revival of the will and surrender thereof to God.

5. I wish, therefore, to propose a test whereby it may be seen when these delights of the senses aforementioned are profitable and when they are not. And it is that, whensoever a person hears music and other things, and sees pleasant things, and is conscious of sweet perfumes, or tastes things that are delicious, or feels soft touches, if his thought and the affection of his will are at once centred upon God and if that thought of God gives him more pleasure than the movement of sense which causes it, and save for that he finds no pleasure in the said movement, this is a sign that he is receiving benefit therefrom, and that this thing of sense is a help to his spirit. In this way such things may be used, for then such things of sense subserve the end for which God created and gave them, which is that He should be the better loved and known because of them. And it must be known, furthermore, that one upon whom these things of sense cause the pure spiritual effect which I describe has no desire for them, and makes hardly any account of them, though they cause him great pleasure when they are offered to him, because of the pleasure which, as I have said, they cause him in God. He is not, however, solicitous for them, and when they are offered to him, as I say, his will passes from them at once and he abandons it to God and sets it upon Him.

6. The reason why he cares little for these motives, although they help him on his journey to God, is that the spirit which is ready to go by every means and in every way to God is so completely nourished and prepared and satisfied by the spirit of God that it lacks nothing and desires nothing; or, if it desires anything to that end, the desire at once passes and is forgotten, and the soul makes no account of it. But one that feels not this liberty of spirit in these things and pleasures of sense, but whose will rests in these pleasures and feeds upon them, is greatly harmed by them and should withdraw himself from the use of them. For, although his reason may desire to employ them to journey to God, yet, inasmuch as his desire finds pleasure in them which is according to sense, and their effect is ever dependent upon the pleasure which they give, he is certain to find hindrance in them rather than help, and harm rather than profit. And, when he sees that the desire for such recreation reigns in him, he must mortify it; for, the stronger it becomes, the more imperfection he will have and the greater will be his weakness.

7. So whatever pleasure coming from sense presents itself to the spiritual person, and whether it come to him by chance or by design, he must make use of it only for God, lifting up to Him the rejoicing of his soul so that his rejoicing may be useful and profitable and perfect; realizing that all rejoicing which implies not renunciation<sup>601</sup> and annihilation of every other kind of rejoicing, although it be with respect to something apparently very lofty, is vain and profits not, but is a hindrance towards the union of the will in God.

## CHAPTER XXV

*Which treats of the evils that afflict the soul when it desires to set the rejoicing of its will upon the good things of sense.*

IN the first place, if the soul does not darken and quench the joy which may arise within it from the things of sense, and direct its rejoicing to God, all the general kinds of evil which we have described as arising from every other kind of rejoicing follow from this joy in the things of sense: such evils are darkness in the reason, lukewarmness, spiritual weariness, etc. But, to come to details, many are the evils, spiritual, bodily and sensual, into which the soul may fall through this rejoicing.

2. First of all, from joy in visible things, when the soul denies not itself therein in order to reach God, there may come to it, directly, vanity of spirit and distraction of the mind, unruly covetousness, immodesty, outward and inward unseemliness, impurity of thought, and envy.

3. From joy in hearing useless things there may directly arise distraction of the imagination, gossiping, envy, rash judgements and vacillating thoughts; and from these arise many other and pernicious evils.

4. From joy in sweet perfumes, there arise loathing of the poor, which is contrary to the teaching of Christ, dislike of serving others, unruliness of heart in humble things, and spiritual insensibility, at least to a degree proportionate with its desire for this joy.

5. From joy in the savour of meat and drink, there arise directly such gluttony and drunkenness, wrath, discord and want of charity with one's neighbours and with the poor, as had that Epulon, who fared sumptuously every day, with Lazarus.<sup>602</sup> Hence arise bodily disorders, infirmities and evil motions, because the incentives to luxury become greater. Directly, too, there arises great spiritual torpor, and the desire for spiritual things is corrupted, so that the soul can derive no enjoyment or satisfaction from them nor can even speak of them. From this joy is likewise born distraction of the other senses and of the heart, and discontent with respect to many things.

6. From joy in the touch of soft things arise many more evils and more pernicious ones, which more quickly cause sense to overflow into spirit, and quench all spiritual strength and vigour. Hence arises the abominable vice of effeminacy, or the incentives thereto, according to the proportion of joy of this kind which is experienced. Hence luxury increases, the mind becomes effeminate and timid, and the senses grow soft and delicate and are predisposed to sin and evil. Vain gladness and joy are infused into the heart; the tongue takes to itself licence and the eyes roam unrestrainedly; and the

---

<sup>601</sup>[*Lit.*, 'that is not in renunciation . . .']

<sup>602</sup>St. Luke xvi, 19.

remaining senses are blunted and deadened, according to the measure<sup>603</sup> of this desire. The judgment is put to confusion, being nourished by spiritual folly and insipidity; moral cowardice and inconstancy increase; and, by the darkness of the soul and the weakness of the heart, fear is begotten even where no fear is. At times, again, this joy begets a spirit of confusion, and insensibility with respect to conscience and spirit; wherefore the reason is greatly enfeebled, and is affected in such a way that it can neither take nor give good counsel, and remains incapable of moral and spiritual blessings and becomes as useless as a broken vessel.

7. All these evils are caused by this kind of rejoicing -- in some more intensely, according to the intensity of their rejoicing, and also according to the complacency or weakness or variableness of the person who yields to it. For there are natures that will receive more detriment from a slight occasion of sin than will others from a great one.

8. Finally, from joy of this kind in touch, a person may fall into as many evils and perils as those which we have described as concerning the good things of nature; and, since these have already been described, I do not detail them here; neither do I describe many other evils wrought thus, such as a falling-off in spiritual exercises and bodily penance and lukewarmness and lack of devotion in the use of the sacraments of penance and of the Eucharist.

## CHAPTER XXVI

*Of the benefits that come to the soul from self-denial in rejoicing as to things of sense, which benefits are spiritual and temporal.*

MARVELLOUS are the benefits that the soul derives from self-denial in this rejoicing: some of these are spiritual and some temporal.

2. The first is that the soul, by restraining its rejoicing as to things of sense, is restored from the distraction into which it has fallen through excessive use of the senses, and is recollected in God. The spirituality and the virtues that it has acquired are preserved; nay, they are increased and increase continually.<sup>604</sup>

3. The second spiritual benefit which comes from self-denial in rejoicing as to things of sense is exceeding great. We may say with truth that that which was sensual becomes spiritual, and that which was animal becomes rational; and even that the soul is journeying from a human life to a portion which is angelical; and that, instead of being temporal and human, it becomes celestial and divine. For, even as a man who seeks the pleasure of things of sense and sets his rejoicing upon them neither merits nor deserves any other name than those which we have given him -- that is, sensual, animal, temporal, etc. -- even so, when he exalts his rejoicing above these things of sense, he merits all those other names -- to wit, spiritual, celestial, etc.

4. And it is clear that this is true; for, although the use of the senses and the power of sensuality are contrary, as the Apostle says, to the power and the exercises of spirituality,<sup>605</sup> it follows that, when the one kind of power is diminished and brought to an end, the other contrary kinds, the growth of which was hindered by the first kinds, are

---

<sup>603</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to the quantity.']

<sup>604</sup>[*Lit.*, 'and gain continually.']

<sup>605</sup>Galatians v, 17.

increased. And thus, when the spirit is perfected (which is the higher part of the soul and the part that has relations with God and receives His communications), it merits all these attributes aforementioned, since it is perfected in the heavenly and spiritual gifts and blessings of God. Both these things are proved by Saint Paul, who calls the sensual man (namely, the man that directs the exercise of his will solely to sense) the animal man, who perceives not the things of God. But this other man, who lifts up his will to God, he calls the spiritual man, saying that this man penetrates and judges all things, even the deep things of God.<sup>606</sup> Therefore the soul gains herein the marvellous benefit of a disposition well able to receive the blessings and spiritual gifts of God.

5. The third benefit is that the pleasures and the rejoicing of the will in temporal matters are very greatly increased; for, as the Saviour says, they shall receive an hundredfold in this life.<sup>607</sup> So that, if thou deniest thyself one joy, the Lord will give thee an hundredfold in this life, both spiritually and temporally; and likewise, for one joy that thou hast in these things of sense, thou shalt have an hundredfold of affliction and misery. For, through the eye that is purged from the joys of sight, there comes to the soul a spiritual joy, directed to God in all things that are seen, whether Divine or profane. Through the ear that is purged from the joy of hearing, there comes to the soul joy most spiritual an hundredfold, directed to God in all that it hears, whether Divine or profane. Even so is it with the other senses when they are purged. For, even as in the state of innocence all that our first parents saw and said and ate in Paradise furnished them with greater sweetness of contemplation, so that the sensual part of their nature might be duly subjected to, and ordered by, reason; even so the man whose senses are purged from all things of sense and made subject to the spirit receives, in their very first motion, the delight of delectable knowledge and contemplation of God.

6. Wherefore, to him that is pure, all things, whether high or low, are an occasion of greater good and further purity; even as the man that is impure is apt to derive evil from things both high and low, because of his impurity. But he that conquers not the joy of desire will not enjoy the serenity of habitual rejoicing in God through His creatures and works. In the man that lives no more according to sense, all the operations of the senses and faculties are directed to Divine contemplation. For, as it is true in good philosophy that each thing operates according to its being, and to the life that it lives, so it is clear, beyond contradiction, that, if the soul lives a spiritual life, the animal life being mortified, it must be journeying straight to God, since all its spiritual actions and motions pertain to the life of the spirit. Hence it follows that such a man, being pure in heart, finds in all things a knowledge of God which is joyful and pleasant, chaste, pure, spiritual, glad and loving.

7. From what has been said I deduce the following doctrine -- namely that, until a man has succeeded in so habituating his senses to the purgation of the joys of sense that from their first motion he is gaining the benefit aforementioned of directing all his powers to God, he must needs deny himself joy and pleasure with respect to these powers, so that he may withdraw his soul from the life of sense. He must fear that since he is not yet spiritual, he may perchance derive from the practice of these things a pleasure and an energy which is of sense rather than of spirit; that the energy which is of sense may predominate in all his actions; and that this may lead to an increase of sensuality and may sustain and nurture it. For, as Our Saviour says, that which is born

---

<sup>606</sup>1 Corinthians ii, 9, 10, 14.

<sup>607</sup>St. Matthew xix, 29.

of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.<sup>608</sup> Let this be closely considered, for it is the truth. And let not him that has not yet mortified his pleasure in things of sense dare to make great use of the power and operation of sense with respect to them, thinking that they will help him to become more spiritual; for the powers of the soul will increase the more without the intervention of these things of sense -- that is, if it quench the joy and desire for them rather than indulge its pleasure in them.

8. There is no need to speak of the blessings of glory that, in the life to come, result from the renunciation of these joys. For, apart from the fact that the bodily gifts of the life of glory, such as agility and clarity, will be much more excellent than in those souls who have not denied themselves, there will be an increase in the essential glory of the soul corresponding to its love of God, for Whose sake it has renounced the things of sense aforementioned. For every momentary, fleeting joy that has been renounced, as Saint Paul says, there shall be laid up an exceeding weight of glory eternally.<sup>609</sup> And I will not here recount the other benefits, whether moral, temporal or spiritual, which result from this night of rejoicing; for they all are those that have already been described, and to a more eminent degree; since these joys that are renounced are more closely linked to the natural man, and therefore he that renounces them acquires thereby a more intimate purity.

## CHAPTER XXVII

*Which begins to treat of the fourth kind of good -- namely, the moral. Describes wherein this consists, and in what manner joy of the will therein is lawful.*

THE fourth kind of good wherein the will may rejoice is moral. By this we here understand the virtues, and the habits of the virtues, in so far as these are moral, and the practice of any virtue, and the practice of works of mercy, the keeping of the law of God, and of that of the commonweal,<sup>610</sup> and the putting into practice of all good intentions and inclinations.

2. These kinds of moral good, when they are possessed and practised, deserve perhaps more than any of the other kinds aforementioned that the will should rejoice in them. For a man may rejoice in his own affairs for one of two reasons, or for both reasons together -- namely, for that which they are in themselves, or for the good which they imply and bring with them as a means and instrument. We shall find that the possession of the three kinds of good already mentioned merits no rejoicing of the will. For of themselves, as has been said, they do no good to man, nor in themselves have they any good, since they are so fleeting and frail; rather, as we have likewise said, they cause and bring him trouble and grief and affliction of spirit. Now, although they might merit that man should rejoice in them for the second reason -- which is that he may profit by them for journeying to God -- this is so uncertain that, as we commonly see, they more often harm man than bring him profit. But good things of a moral kind merit a

---

<sup>608</sup>St. John iii, 6.

<sup>609</sup>2 Corinthians iv, 17.

<sup>610</sup>[*Lit.*, *pol'tica*, the 'political' virtue of Aristotle and St. Thomas -- i.e., the 'social,' as opposed to the 'moral,' 'intellectual' and 'theological' virtues. P. Silverio glosses the word as meaning 'good government in the commonweal, courtesy and other social virtues.']

certain degree of rejoicing in him that possesses them, and this for the first reason -- namely, for their intrinsic nature and worth. For they bring with them peace and tranquillity, and a right and ordered use of the reason and actions that are consistent therewith, so that a man cannot, humanly speaking, have anything better in this life.

3. Thus, since these virtues deserve to be loved and esteemed, humanly speaking, for their own sakes, a man may well rejoice in the possession of them, and may practise them for that which they are in themselves, and for the blessing which they bring to man in human and temporal form. In this way and for this reason philosophers and wise men and princes of old esteemed and praised them, and endeavoured to possess and practise them; and, although they were heathen, and regarded them only in a temporal manner, merely considering the blessings which they knew would result from them -- temporal, corporeal and natural -- they not only obtained by means of them the temporal renown and benefits which they sought, but, apart from this, God, Who loves all that is good (even in barbarians and heathen) and, as the Wise Man says, hinders the doing of naught that is good,<sup>611</sup> gave them longer life, greater honour, dominion and peace (as He did for example to the Romans), because they made just laws; for He subjected nearly the whole world to them, and gave rewards of a temporal kind for their good customs to those who because of their unbelief were incapable of eternal reward. For God loves moral good so much that, merely because Solomon asked wisdom of Him that he might teach his people, govern them justly and bring them up in good customs, God Himself was greatly pleased with him, and told him that, because he had asked for wisdom to that end, this should be given him, and there should also be given him that which he had not asked, namely, riches and honour, so that no king, either in the past or in the future, should be like him.<sup>612</sup>

4. But, although the Christian should rejoice in this first way in the moral good that he possesses and in the good works of a temporal kind which he does, since they lead to the temporal blessings which we have described, he must not allow his joy to stop at this first stage (as we have said the heathen did, because their spiritual sight extended not beyond the things of this mortal life); but, since he has the light of faith, wherein he hopes for eternal life, without which nothing that belongs to this life and the next will be of any value to him, he must rejoice principally and solely in the possession and employment of this moral good after the second manner -- namely, in that by doing these works for the love of God he will gain eternal life. And thus he should set his eyes and his rejoicing solely on serving and honouring God with his good customs and virtues. For without this intention the virtues are of no worth in the sight of God, as is seen in the ten virgins of the Gospel, who had all kept their virginity and done good works; and yet, because the joy of five of them was not of the second kind (that is, because they had not directed their joy to God), but was rather after the first and vain kind, for they rejoiced in the possession of their good works, they were cast out from Heaven with no acknowledgement or reward from the Bridegroom. And likewise many persons of old had many virtues and practised good works, and many Christians have them nowadays and accomplish great acts, which will profit them nothing for eternal life, because they have not sought in them the glory and honour which belong to God alone. The Christian, then, must rejoice, not in the performing of good works and the following of good customs, but in doing them for the love of God alone, without respect too aught

---

<sup>611</sup>Wisdom vii, 22.

<sup>612</sup>3 Kings [A.V. 1 Kings] iii, 11-13.

else soever. For, inasmuch as good works that are done to serve God alone will have the greater reward in glory, the greater will be the confusion in the presence of God of those who have done them for other reasons.

5. The Christian, then, if he will direct his rejoicing to God with regard to moral good, must realize that the value of his good works, fasts, alms, penances, etc., is based, not upon the number or the quality of them, but upon the love of God which inspires him to do them; and that they are the more excellent when they are performed with a purer and sincerer love of God, and when there is less in them of self-interest, joy, pleasure, consolation and praise, whether with reference to this world or to the next. Wherefore the heart must not be set upon pleasure, consolation and delight, and the other interests which good works and practices commonly bring with them, but it must concentrate its rejoicing upon God. It must desire to serve Him in its good works, and purge itself from this other rejoicing, remaining in darkness with respect to it and desiring that God alone shall have joy in its good works and shall take secret pleasure therein, without any other intention and delight than those relating to the honour and glory of God. And thus, with respect to this moral good, the soul will concentrate all the strength of its will upon God.

## CHAPTER XXVIII

*Of seven evils into which a man may fall if he set the rejoicing of his will upon moral good.*

THE principal evils into which a man may fall through vain rejoicing in his good works and habits I find to be seven; and they are very hurtful because they are spiritual.

2. The first evil is vanity, pride, vainglory and presumption; for a man cannot rejoice in his works without esteeming them. And hence arise boasting and like things, as is said of the Pharisee in the Gospel, who prayed and congratulated himself before God,<sup>613</sup> boasting that he fasted and did other good works.

3. The second evil is usually linked with this: it is our judging others, by comparison with ourselves, as wicked and imperfect, when it seems to us that their acts and good works are inferior to our own; we esteem them the less highly in our hearts, and at times also in our speech. This evil was likewise that of the Pharisee, for in his prayer he said: 'I thank Thee that I am not as other men are: robbers, unjust and adulterers.'<sup>614</sup> So that by one single act he fell into these two evils, esteeming himself and despising others, as do many nowadays, saying: I am not like such a man, nor do I do this and that, as does such or such a man. And many of these are even worse than the Pharisee. He, it is true, not only despised others, but also pointed to an individual, saying: 'Nor am I like this publican.' But they, not satisfied with either of these things, go so far as to be angry and envious when they see that others are praised, or do more, or are of greater use, than themselves.

4. The third evil is that, as they look for pleasure in their good works, they usually perform them only when they see that some pleasure and praise will result from them.

---

<sup>613</sup>St. Luke xviii, 11-12.

<sup>614</sup>St. Luke xviii, 11.

And thus, as Christ says, they do everything *ut videantur ab hominibus*,<sup>615</sup> and work not for the love of God alone.

5. The fourth evil follows from this. It is that they will have no reward from God, since they have desired in this life to have joy or consolation or honour or some other kind of interest as a result of their good works: of such the Saviour says that herein they have received their reward.<sup>616</sup> And thus they have had naught but the labour of their work and are confounded, and receive no reward. There is so much misery among the sons of men which has to do with this evil that I myself believe that the greater number of good works which they perform in public are either vicious or will be of no value to them, or are imperfect in the sight of God, because they are not detached from these human intentions and interests. For what other judgment can be formed of some of the actions which certain men perform, and of the memorials which they set up, when they will not perform these actions at all unless they are surrounded by human respect and honour, which are the vanity of life, or unless they can perpetuate in these memorials their name, lineage or authority, even setting up their emblems and escutcheons in the very churches, as if they wished to set themselves, in the stead of images, in places where all bend the knee? In these good works which some men perform, may it not be said that they are worshipping<sup>617</sup> themselves more than God? This is certainly true if they perform them for the reason described and otherwise would not perform them at all. But leaving aside these, which are the worst cases, how many are there who fall into these evils in their good works in many ways? Some wish to be praised, others to be thanked, others enumerate their good works and desire that this person and that shall know of them, and indeed the whole world; and sometimes they wish an intermediary to present their alms, or to perform other of their charitable deeds,<sup>618</sup> so that more may be known of them; and some desire all these things. This is the sounding of the trumpet, which, says the Saviour in the Gospel, vain men do, for which reason they shall have no reward for their works from God.<sup>619</sup>

6. In order to flee from this evil, such persons must hide their good works so that God alone may see them, and must not desire anyone to take notice of them. And they must hide them, not only from others, but even from themselves. That is to say, they must find no satisfaction in them, nor esteem them as if they were of some worth, nor derive pleasure from them at all. It is this that is spiritually indicated in those words of Our Lord: 'Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth.'<sup>620</sup> Which is as much to say: Esteem not with thy carnal and temporal eye the work that thou doest spiritually. And in this way the strength of the will is concentrated upon God, and a good deed bears fruit in His sight; so that not only will it not be lost, but it will be of great merit. And in this sense must be understood that passage from Job: 'If I have kissed my hand with my mouth, which is a great sin and iniquity, and my heart hath rejoiced in secret.'<sup>621</sup> Here by the hand is understood good works, and by the mouth is understood the will which finds satisfaction in them. And since this is, as we say, finding satisfaction in

---

<sup>615</sup>St. Matthew xxiii, 5.

<sup>616</sup>St. Matthew vi, 2.

<sup>617</sup>[*Lit.*, 'are adoring.']

<sup>618</sup>[*Lit.*, 'to present their alms or that which they do.']

<sup>619</sup>St. Matthew vi, 2.

<sup>620</sup>St. Matthew vi, 3.

<sup>621</sup>Job xxxi, 27-8.



oneself, he says: If my heart hath rejoiced in secret, which is a great iniquity against God and a denial of Him. And this is as though he were to say that he had no satisfaction, neither did his heart rejoice in secret.

7. The fifth of these evils is that such persons make no progress on the road of perfection. For, since they are attached to the pleasure and consolation which they find in their good works, it follows that, when they find no such pleasure and consolation in their good works and exercises, which ordinarily happens when God desires to lead them on, by giving them the dry bread of the perfect and taking from them the milk of babes, in order to prove their strength and to purge their delicate appetites so that they may be able to enjoy the food of grown men, they commonly faint and cease to persevere, because their good works give them no pleasure. In this way may be spiritually understood these words of the Wise Man: 'Dying flies spoil the sweetness of ointment.'<sup>622</sup> For, when any mortification comes to these persons, they die to their good works and cease to practise them; and thus they lose their perseverance, wherein are found sweetness of spirit and interior consolation.

8. The sixth of these evils is that such persons commonly deceive themselves, thinking that the things and good works which give them pleasure must be better than those that give them none. They praise and esteem the one kind and depreciate the other; yet as a rule those works whereby a man is most greatly mortified (especially when he is not proficient in perfection) are more acceptable and precious in the sight of God, by reason of the self-denial which a man must observe in performing them, than are those wherein he finds consolation and which may very easily be an occasion of self-seeking. And in this connection Micheas says of them: *Malum manuum suarum dicunt bonum*.<sup>623</sup> That is: That which is bad in their works they call good. This comes to them because of the pleasure which they take in their good works, instead of thinking only of giving pleasure to God. The extent to which this evil predominates, whether in spiritual men or in ordinary persons, would take too long to describe, for hardly anyone can be found who is moved to do such works simply for God's sake, without the attraction of some advantage of consolation or pleasure, or some other consideration.

9. The seventh evil is that, in so far as a man stifles not vain rejoicing in moral works, he is to that extent incapable of receiving reasonable counsel and instruction with regard to good works that he should perform. For he is lettered by the habit of weakness that he has acquired through performing good works with attachment to vain rejoicing; so that he cannot consider the counsel of others as best, or, even if he considers it to be so, he cannot follow it, through not having the necessary strength of mind. Such persons as this are greatly weakened in charity toward God and their neighbour; for the self-love with respect to their good works in which they indulge causes their charity to grow cold.

## CHAPTER XXIX

*Of the benefits which come to the soul through the withdrawal of its rejoicing from moral good.*

---

<sup>622</sup>Ecclesiastes x, 1.

<sup>623</sup>Micheas vii, 3.

VERY great are the benefits which come to the soul when it desires not to set the vain rejoicing of its will on this kind of good. For, in the first place, it is freed from falling into many temptations and deceits of the devil, which are involved in rejoicing in these good works, as we may understand by that which is said in Job, namely: 'He sleepeth under the shadow, in the covert of the reed and in moist places.'<sup>624</sup> This he applies to the devil, who deceives the soul in the moisture of rejoicing and in the vanity of the reed -- that is, in vain works. And it is no wonder if the soul is secretly deceived by the devil in this rejoicing; for, apart altogether from his suggestions, vain rejoicing is itself deception. This is especially true when there is any boasting of heart concerning these good works, as Jeremias well says in these words: *Arrogantia tua decepit te.*<sup>625</sup> For what greater deception is there than boasting? And from this the soul that purges itself from this rejoicing is freed.

2. The second benefit is that the soul performs its good works with greater deliberation and perfection than it can if there be in them the passion of joy and pleasure. For, because of this passion of joy, the passions of wrath and concupiscence are so strong that they will not submit to reason,<sup>626</sup> but ordinarily cause a man to be inconsistent in his actions and purposes, so that he abandons some and takes up others, and begins a thing only to abandon it without completing any part of it. For, since he acts under the influence of pleasure, and since pleasure is variable, being much stronger in some natures than in others, it follows that, when this pleasure ceases, both the action and its purpose cease, important though they may be. To such persons the joy which they have in their work is the soul and the strength thereof; and, when the joy is quenched, the work ceases and perishes, and they persevere therein no longer. It is of such persons that Christ says: 'They receive the word with joy, and then the devil taketh it away from them, lest they should persevere.'<sup>627</sup> And this is because they have no strength and no roots save in the joy aforementioned. To take and to withdraw their will, therefore, from this rejoicing is the cause of their perseverance and success. This benefit, then, is a great one, even as the contrary evil is great likewise. The wise man sets his eyes upon the substance and benefit of his work, not upon the pleasure and delight which it gives him; and so he is not beating the air, but derives from his work a stable joy, without any meed of bitterness.

3. The third benefit is divine. It is that, when vain joy in these good works is quenched, the soul becomes poor in spirit, which is one of the blessings spoken of by the Son of God when He says: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven.'<sup>628</sup>

4. The fourth benefit is that he that denies himself this joy will be meek, humble and prudent in his actions. For he will not act impetuously and rapidly, through being impelled by the wrath and concupiscence which belong to joy; neither presumptuously, through being affected by the esteem of his own work which he cherishes because of the joy that he has in it; neither incautiously, through being blinded by joy.

5. The fifth benefit is that he becomes pleasing to God and man, and is freed from spiritual sloth, gluttony and avarice, and from spiritual envy and from a thousand

---

<sup>624</sup>Job xl, 16 [A.V., xl, 21].

<sup>625</sup>Jeremias xlix, 16. E.p. adds the translation: 'Thy arrogance hath deceived thee.'

<sup>626</sup>[*Lit.*, 'will not give place to the weight of reason.']

<sup>627</sup>St. Luke viii, 12.

<sup>628</sup>St. Matthew v, 3.

other vices.

## CHAPTER XXX

*Which begins to treat of the fifth kind of good wherein the will may rejoice, which is the supernatural. Describes the nature of these supernatural good things, and how they are distinguished from the spiritual, and how joy in them is to be directed to God.*

IT now behoves us to treat of the fifth kind of good thing wherein the soul may rejoice, which is the supernatural. By this term we here understand all the gifts and graces given by God which transcend natural virtue and capacity and are called *gratis datae*. Such as these are the gifts of wisdom and knowledge which God gave to Solomon, and the graces whereof Saint Paul speaks<sup>629</sup> -- namely, faith, gifts of healing, the working of miracles, prophecy, knowledge and discernment of spirits, interpretation of words and likewise the gift of tongues.

2. These good things, it is true, are also spiritual, like those of the same kind of which we have to speak presently; yet, since the two are so different, I have thought well to make a distinction between them. The practice of these has an intimate relation with the profit of man, and it is with a view to this profit and to this end that God gives them. As Saint Paul says: 'The spirit is given to none save for the profit of the rest;'<sup>630</sup> this is to be understood of these graces. But the use and practice of spiritual graces has to do with the soul and God alone, and with God and the soul, in the communion of understanding and will, etc., as we shall say hereafter. And thus there is a difference in their object, since spiritual graces have to do only with the Creator and the soul; whereas supernatural graces have to do with the creature, and furthermore differ in substance, and therefore in their operation, and thus of necessity the instruction which we give concerning them differs also.

3. Speaking now of supernatural graces and gifts as we here understand them, I say that, in order to purge ourselves of vain joy in them, it is well here to notice two benefits which are comprised in this kind of gift -- namely, temporal and spiritual. The temporal benefits are the healing of infirmities, the receiving of their sight by the blind, the raising of the dead, the casting out of devils, prophesying concerning the future so that men may take heed to themselves, and other things of the kind. The spiritual and eternal benefit is that God is known and served through these good works by him that performs them, or by those in whom and in whose presence they are performed.

4. With respect to the first kind of benefit -- namely, the temporal -- supernatural works and miracles merit little or no rejoicing on the part of the soul; for, without the second kind of benefit, they are of little or no importance to man, since they are not in themselves a means for uniting the soul with God, as charity is. And these supernatural works and graces may be performed by those who are not in a state of grace and charity, whether they truly give thanks and attribute their gifts to God,<sup>631</sup> as did the wicked prophet Balaam, and Solomon, or whether they perform them falsely, through the agency of the devil, as did Simon Magus, or by means of other secrets of nature.

---

<sup>629</sup>1 Corinthians xii, 9-10.

<sup>630</sup>1 Corinthians xii, 7.

<sup>631</sup>[*Lit.*, 'give thanks and gifts to God.']

These works and marvels, if any of them were to be of any profit to him that worked them, would be true works given by God. And Saint Paul teaches us what these are worth without the second kind of benefit, saying: 'Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as a sounding bell or metal. And though I have prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, even as much as may remove<sup>632</sup> mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing, etc.'<sup>633</sup> Wherefore Christ will refuse the requests of many who have esteemed their good works in this way, when they beg Him for glory because of them, saying: Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name and worked many miracles? Then Christ will say to them: 'Depart from Me, workers of iniquity.'<sup>634</sup>

5. A man, then, should rejoice, not when he has such graces and makes use of them, but when he reaps from them the second spiritual fruit, namely that of serving God in them with true charity, for herein is the fruit of eternal life. For this cause Our Saviour reproveth the disciples who were rejoicing because they cast out devils, saying: 'Desire not to rejoice in this, that devils are subject to you, but rather because your names are written in the book of life.'<sup>635</sup> This, according to good theology, is as much as to say: Rejoice if your names are written in the book of life. By this it is understood that a man should not rejoice save when he is walking in the way of life, which he may do by performing good works in charity; for where is the profit and what is the worth in the sight of God of aught that is not love of God? And this love is not perfect if it be not strong and discreet in purging the will of joy in all things, and if it be not set upon doing the will of God alone. And in this manner the will is united with God through these good things which are supernatural.

## CHAPTER XXXI

*Of the evils which come to the soul when it sets the rejoicing of the will upon this kind of good.*

THEE principal evils, it seems to me, may come to the soul when it sets its rejoicing upon supernatural good. These are: that it may deceive and be deceived; that it may fall away from the faith; and that it may indulge in vainglory or some other such vanity.

2. As to the first of these, it is a very easy thing to deceive others, and to deceive oneself, by rejoicing in this kind of operation. And the reason is that, in order to know which of these operations are false and which are true, and how and at what time they should be practised, much counsel and much light from God are needful, both of which are greatly impeded by joy in these operations and esteem for them. And this for two reasons: first, because joy blunts and obscures the judgment; second, because, when a man has joy in these things, not only does he the more quickly become eager for them, but he is also the more impelled to practise them out of the proper season. And even supposing the virtues and operations which are practised to be genuine, these two defects suffice for us to be frequently deceived in them, either through not

---

<sup>632</sup>[*traspasar. lit., 'go over,' 'go through.'*]

<sup>633</sup>1 Corinthians xiii, 1-2.

<sup>634</sup>St. Matthew vii, 22-3.

<sup>635</sup>St. Luke x, 20.

understanding them as they should be understood, or through not profiting by them and not using them at the times and in the ways that are most meet. For, although it is true that, when God gives these gifts and graces, He gives light by which to see them, and the impulse whereby a man may know at what times and in what ways to use them; yet these souls, through the attachment and imperfection which they may have with regard to them, may greatly err, by not using them with the perfection that God desires of them therein, and in the way and at the time that He wills. We read that Balaam desired to do this, when, against the will of God, he determined to go and curse the people of Israel, for which reason God was wroth and purposed to slay him.<sup>636</sup> And Saint James and Saint John desired to call down fire from Heaven upon the Samaritans because they gave not lodging to Our Saviour, and for this He reproveth them.<sup>637</sup>

3. Here it is evident that these persons were led to determine to perform these works, when it was not meet for them to do so, by a certain imperfect passion, which was inherent in their joy in them and esteem for them. For, when no such imperfection exists, the soul is moved and determined to perform these virtues only in the manner wherein God so moves it, and at His time, and until then it is not right that they should be performed. It was for this reason that God complained of certain prophets, through Jeremias, saying: 'I sent not the prophets, and they ran; I spake not to them, and they prophesied.'<sup>638</sup> And later He says: 'They deceived My people by their lying and their miracles, when I had not commanded them, neither had I sent them.'<sup>639</sup> And in that place He says of them likewise: 'They see the visions of their heart, and speak of them'<sup>640</sup>; which would not happen if they had not this abominable attachment to these works.

4. From these passages it is to be understood that the evil of this rejoicing not only leads men to make wicked and perverse use of these graces given by God, as did Balaam and those of whom the prophet here says that they worked miracles whereby they deceived the people, but it even leads them to use these graces without having been given them by God, like those who prophesied their own fancies and published the visions which they invented or which the devil represented to them. For, when the devil sees them affectioned to these things, he opens a wide field to them, gives them abundant material and interferes with them in many ways; whereupon they spread their sails and become shamelessly audacious in the freedom wherewith they work these marvels.

5. Nor does the evil stop here. To such a point does their joy in these works and their eagerness for them extend that, if before they had a secret compact with the devil (and many of them do in fact perform these works by such secret compacts), it now makes them bold enough to work with him by an explicit and manifest compact, submitting themselves to him, by agreement, as his disciples and allies. Hence we have wizards, enchanters, magicians, soothsayers and sorcerers. And so far does the joy of these persons in their works carry them that, not only do they seek to purchase gifts and graces with money, as did Simon Magus, in order to serve the devil, but they even strive to obtain sacred things, and (which cannot be said without trembling) Divine things, for

---

<sup>636</sup>Numbers xxii, 22-3.

<sup>637</sup>St. Luke ix, 54-5.

<sup>638</sup>Jeremias xxiii, 21.

<sup>639</sup>Jeremias xxiii, 32.

<sup>640</sup>Jeremias xxiii, 26.

even the very Body<sup>641</sup> of our Lord Jesus Christ has been seen to be usurped for the use of their wicked deeds and abominations. May God here extend and show to them His great mercy!

6. Everyone will clearly understand how pernicious are such persons to themselves and how prejudicial to Christianity. It may be noted here that all those magicians and soothsayers who lived among the children of Israel, whom Saul destroyed out of the land, because they desired to imitate the true prophets of God, had fallen into such abominations and deceits.

7. He, then, that has supernatural gifts and graces ought to refrain from desiring to practise them, and from rejoicing in so doing, nor ought he to care to exercise them; for God, Who gives Himself to such persons, by supernatural means, for the profit of His Church and of its members, will move them likewise supernaturally in such a manner and at such time as He desires. As He commanded His faithful ones to take no thought as to what they were to say, or as to how they were to say it, since this is the supernatural business of faith, it will likewise be His will (as these operations are no less a supernatural matter) that a man should wait and allow God to work by moving his heart, since it is in the virtue of this working that there will be wrought all virtue. The disciples (so we read in the Acts of the Apostles), although these graces and gifts had been infused within them, prayed to God, beseeching Him to be pleased to stretch forth His hand in making signs and performing works of healing through them, that they might introduce the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ into men's hearts.<sup>642</sup>

8. From this first evil may proceed the second, which is a falling away from the faith; this can come to pass after two manners. The first has respect to others; for, when a man sets out, unseasonably and needlessly, to perform a marvel or a mighty work, apart from the fact that this is tempting God, which is a great sin, it may be that he will not succeed, and will engender in the hearts of men discredit and contempt for the faith. For, although at times such persons may succeed because for other reasons and purposes God so wills it, as in the case of Saul's witch<sup>643</sup> (if it be true that it was indeed Samuel who appeared on that occasion), they will not always so succeed; and, when they do so, they go astray none the less and are blameworthy for having used these graces when it was not fitting. The second manner in which we may fall away is in ourselves and has respect to the merit of faith; for, if a man make much account of these miracles, he ceases to lean upon the substantial practice of faith, which is an obscure habit; and thus, where signs and witnesses abound, there is less merit in believing. In this way Saint Gregory says that faith has no merit when human reason provides experience.<sup>644</sup> And thus these marvels are never worked by God save when they are really necessary for belief. Therefore, to the end that His disciples should not be without merit, though they had experience of His resurrection, He did many things before He showed Himself to them, so that they should believe Him without seeing Him. To Mary Magdalene, first of all, He showed the empty tomb, and afterwards bade the angels speak to her<sup>645</sup> (for, as Saint Paul says, faith comes by hearing);<sup>646</sup> so that,

---

<sup>641</sup>[*Lit.*, 'the awful Body.']

<sup>642</sup>Acts iv, 29-30.

<sup>643</sup>1 Kings [A.V., 1 Samuel] xxviii, 7, ff.

<sup>644</sup>'Nec fides habet meritum cui humana ratio praebebat experimentum.' St. Gregory, Hom. 26 in Evang. (Migne, Vol. LXXVI, p. 1,137).

<sup>645</sup>[St. Luke xxiv, 6; St. John xx, 2.]

having heard, she should believe before she saw. And, although she saw Him, it was as an ordinary man,<sup>647</sup> that, by the warmth of His presence, He might completely instruct her in the belief which she lacked. And He first sent to tell His disciples, with the women, and afterwards they went to see the tomb. And, as to those who went to Emmaus, He first of all enkindled their hearts in faith so that they might see Him, dissembling with them as He walked.<sup>648</sup> And finally He reproved them all because they had not believed those who had announced to them His resurrection.<sup>649</sup> And He reproved Saint Thomas because he desired to have the witness of His wounds, by telling him that they who saw Him not and yet believed Him were blessed.<sup>650</sup>

9. And thus it is not the will of God that miracles should be wrought: when He works them, He does so, as it were, because He cannot do otherwise. And for this cause He reproved the Pharisees because they believed not save through signs, saying: 'Unless ye see marvels and signs, ye believe not.'<sup>651</sup> Those, then, who love to rejoice in these supernatural works lose much in the matter of faith.

10. The third evil is that, because of their joy in these works, men commonly fall into vainglory or some other vanity. For even their joy in these wonders, when it is not, as we have said, purely in God and for God, is vanity; which is evident in the reproof given by Our Lord to the disciples because they had rejoiced that devils were subject to them;<sup>652</sup> for which joy, if it had not been vain, He would not have reproved them.

## CHAPTER XXXII

*Of two benefits which are derived from the renunciation of rejoicing in the matter of the supernatural graces.*

BESIDES the benefits which the soul gains by being delivered from the three evils aforementioned through its renunciation of this joy, it acquires two excellent benefits. The first is that it magnifies and exalts God: the second is that it exalts itself. For God is exalted in the soul after two manners: first, by the withdrawal of the heart and the joy of the will from all that is not God, in order that they may be set upon Him alone. This David signified in the verse which we quoted when we began to speak of the night of this faculty; namely: 'Man shall attain to a lofty heart, and God shall be exalted.'<sup>653</sup> For, when the heart is raised above all things, the soul is exalted above them all.

2. And, because in this way the soul centres itself in God alone, God is exalted and magnified, when He reveals to the soul His excellence and greatness; for, in this elevation of joy, God bears witness of Who He Himself is. This cannot be done save if the will be voided of joy and consolation with respect to all things, even as David said

---

<sup>646</sup>[Romans x, 17.]

<sup>647</sup>[St. John xx, 15].

<sup>648</sup>St. Luke xxiv, 15.

<sup>649</sup>[St. Luke xxiv, 25-6.]

<sup>650</sup>St. John xx, 29.

<sup>651</sup>St. John iv, 48.

<sup>652</sup>St. Luke x, 20.

<sup>653</sup>Psalm lxiii, 7 [A.V., lxiv, 6-7].

also, in these words: 'Be still and see that I am God.'<sup>654</sup> And again he says: 'In a desert land, dry and pathless, have I appeared before Thee, to see Thy power and Thy glory.'<sup>655</sup> And, since it is true that God is exalted by the fixing of the soul's rejoicing upon detachment from all things, He is much more highly exalted when the soul withdraws itself from the most wondrous of these things in order to fix its rejoicing on Him alone. For these, being supernatural, are of a nobler kind; and thus for the soul to cast them aside, in order to set its rejoicing upon God alone, is for it to attribute greater glory and excellence to God than to them. For, the more and the greater things a man despises for the sake of another, the more does he esteem and exalt that other.

3. Furthermore, God is exalted after the second manner when the will is withdrawn from this kind of operation; for, the more God is believed and served without testimonies and signs, the more He is exalted by the soul, for it believes more concerning God than signs and miracles can demonstrate.

4. The second benefit wherein the soul is exalted consists in this, that, withdrawing the will from all desire for apparent signs and testimonies, it is exalted in purest faith, which God increases and infuses within it much more intensely. And, together with this, He increases in it the other two theological virtues, which are charity and hope, wherein the soul enjoys the highest Divine knowledge by means of the obscure and detached habit of faith; and it enjoys great delight of love by means of charity, whereby the will rejoices in naught else than in the living God; and likewise it enjoys satisfaction in the memory by means of hope. All this is a wondrous benefit, which leads essentially and directly to the perfect union of the soul with God.

## CHAPTER XXXIII

*Which begins to treat of the sixth kind of good wherein the soul may rejoice. Describes its nature and makes the first division under this head.*

SINCE the intention of this work of ours is to lead the spirit through these good things of the spirit even to the Divine union of the soul with God, it will not behove both myself and the reader to give our consideration to this matter with particular care. For, in speaking of this sixth kind of good, we have to treat of the good things of the spirit, which are those that are of the greatest service to this end. For it is quite certain, and quite an ordinary occurrence,<sup>656</sup> that some persons, because of their lack of knowledge, make use of spiritual things with respect only to sense, and leave the spirit empty. There will scarcely be anyone whose spirit is not to a considerable degree corrupted by sweetness of sense; since, if the water be drunk up before it reaches the spirit, the latter becomes dry and barren.

2. Coming to this matter, then, I say that by good things of the spirit I understand all those that influence and aid the soul in Divine things and in its intercourse with God, and the communications of God to the soul.

3. Beginning by making a division between these supreme kinds of good, I say that good things of the spirit are of two kinds: the one kind is delectable and the other

---

<sup>654</sup>Psalm xlv, 11 [A.V., xlvi, 10].

<sup>655</sup>Psalm lxii, 3 [A.V., lxii, 1-2].

<sup>656</sup>[*Lit.*, 'thing.']



painful. And each of these kinds is likewise of two manners; for the delectable kind consists of clear things that are distinctly understood, and also of things that are not understood clearly or distinctly. The painful kind, likewise, may be of clear and distinct things, or of things dark and confused.

4. Between all these we may likewise make distinctions with respect to the faculties of the soul. For some kinds of spiritual good, being of knowledge, pertain to the understanding; others, being of affection, pertain to the will; and others, inasmuch as they are imaginary, pertain to the memory.

5. We shall leave for later consideration those good things that are painful, since they pertain to the passive night, in treating of which we shall have to speak of them; and likewise the delectable blessings which we described as being of things confused and not distinct, of which we shall treat hereafter, since they pertain to that general, confused and loving knowledge wherein is effected the union of the soul with God, and which we passed over in the second book, deferring it so that we might treat of it later<sup>657</sup> when we should make a division between the apprehensions of the understanding. We shall speak here and now of those delectable blessings which are of things clear and distinct.

#### CHAPTER XXXIV

*Of those good things of the spirit which can be distinctly apprehended by the understanding and the memory. Describes how the will is to behave in the matter of rejoicing in them.*

WE might spend much time here upon the multitude of the apprehensions of the memory and the understanding, teaching how the will is to conduct itself with regard to the joy that it may have in them, had we not treated of this at length in the second and the third book. But, since we there spoke of the manner wherein it behoves these two faculties to act with respect to them, in order that they may take the road to Divine union, and since it behoves the will to conduct itself likewise as regards rejoicing in them, it is unnecessary to go over this here; for it suffices to say that wheresoever we there said that those faculties should void themselves of this or that apprehension, it is to be understood also that the will should likewise be voided of joy in them. And in the way wherein it is said that memory and understanding are to conduct themselves with regard to all these apprehensions, the will must conduct itself likewise; for, since the understanding and the other faculties cannot admit or reject anything unless the will intervene therein, it is clear that the same teaching that serves for the one will serve also for the other.

2. It may there be seen, then, what is requisite in this case, for the soul will fall into all the evils and perils to which we there referred if it cannot direct the rejoicing of the will to God in all those apprehensions.

#### CHAPTER XXXV

---

<sup>657</sup>[In spite of this promise, the Saint does not return to this subject at such length as his language here would suggest.]

*Of the delectable spiritual good things which can be distinctly apprehended by the will. Describes the kinds of these.*

WE can reduce all the kinds of good which can distinctly cause joy to the will to four: namely, motive, provocative, directive and perfective. Of these we shall speak in turn, each in its order; and first, of the motive kind -- namely, images and portraits of saints, oratories and ceremonies.

2. As touching images and portraits, there may be much vanity and vain rejoicing in these. For, though they are most important for Divine worship and most necessary to move the will to devotion, as is shown by the approval given to them and the use made of them by our Mother Church (for which reason it is always well that we should employ them, in order to awaken our lukewarmness), there are many persons who rejoice rather in the painting and decoration of them than in what they represent.

3. The use of images has been ordained by the Church for two principal ends -- namely, that we may reverence the saints in them, and that the will may be moved and devotion to the saints awakened by them. When they serve this purpose they are beneficial and the use of them is necessary; and therefore we must choose those that are most true and lifelike, and that most move the will to devotion, and our eyes must ever be fixed upon this motive rather than upon the value and cunning of their workmanship and decoration. For, as I say, there are some who pay more attention to the cunning with which an image is made, and to its value, than to what it represents; and that interior devotion which they ought to direct spiritually to the saint whom they see not, forgetting the image at once, since it serves only as a motive, they squander upon the cunning and the decoration of its outward workmanship. In this way sense is pleased and delighted, and the love and rejoicing of the will remain there. This is a complete hindrance to true spirituality, which demands annihilation of the affections as to all particular things.

4. This will become quite clear from the detestable custom which certain persons observe with regard to images in these our days. Holding not in abhorrence the vain trappings of the world, they adorn images with the garments which from time to time vain persons invent in order to satisfy their own pleasures and vanities. So they clothe images with garments reprehensible even in themselves, a kind of vanity which was, and is still, abhorrent to the saints whom the images represent. Herein, with their help, the devil succeeds in canonizing his vanities, by clothing the saints with them, not without causing them great displeasure. And in this way the honest and grave devotion of the soul, which rejects and spurns all vanity and every trace of it, becomes with them little more than a dressing of dolls; some persons use images merely as idols upon which they have set their rejoicing. And thus you will see certain persons who are never tired of adding one image to another, and wish them to be of this or that kind and workmanship, and to be placed in this or that manner, so as to be pleasing to sense; and they make little account of the devotion of the heart. They are as much attached to them as was Michas to his idols,<sup>658</sup> or as was Laban;<sup>659</sup> for the one ran out of his house crying aloud because they were being taken from him; and the other, having made a long journey and been very wroth because of them, disturbed all the household stuff of

---

<sup>658</sup>Judges xviii, 22-4.

<sup>659</sup>Genesis xxxi, 34-7.

Jacob, in searching for them.

5. The person who is truly devout sets his devotion principally upon that which is invisible; he needs few images and uses few, and chooses those that harmonize with the Divine rather than with the human, clothing them, and with them himself, in the garments of the world to come, and following its fashions rather than those of this world. For not only does an image belonging to this world in no way influence his desire; it does not even lead him to think of this world, in spite of his having before his eyes something worldly, akin to the world's interests. Nor is his heart attached to the images that he uses; if they are taken from him, he grieves very little, for he seeks within himself the living image, which is Christ crucified, for Whose sake he even desires that all should be taken from him and he should have nothing. Even when the motives and means which lead him closest to God are taken from him, he remains in tranquility. For the soul is nearer perfection when it is tranquil and joyous, though it be deprived of these motives, than if it has possession of them together with desire and attachment. For, although it is good to be pleased to have such images as assist the soul to greater devotion (for which reason it is those which move it most that must always be chosen), yet it is something far removed from perfection to be so greatly attached to them as to possess them with attachment, so that, if they are taken away from the soul, it becomes sad.

6. Let the soul be sure that, the more closely it is attached to an image or a motive, the less will its devotion and prayer mount to God. For, although it is true that, since some are more appropriate than others, and excite devotion more than others, it is well, for this reason alone, to be more affectioned to some than to others, as I have just now said, yet there must be none of the attachment and affection which I have described. Otherwise, that which has to sustain the spirit in its flight to God, in total forgetfulness, will be wholly occupied by sense, and the soul will be completely immersed in a delight afforded it by what are but instruments. These instruments I have to use, but solely in order to assist me in devotion; and, on account of my imperfection, they may well serve me as a hindrance, no less so than may affection and attachment to anything else.

7.<sup>660</sup> But, though perhaps in this matter of images you may think that there is something to be said on the other side, if you have not clearly understood how much detachment and poverty of spirit is required by perfection, at least you cannot excuse the imperfection which is commonly indulged with regard to rosaries; for you will hardly find anyone who has not some weakness with regard to these, desiring them to be of this workmanship rather than of that, or of this colour or metal rather than of that, or decorated in some one style or in some other. Yet no one style is better than another for the hearing of a prayer by God, for this depends upon the simple and true heart, which looks at no more than pleasing God, and, apart from the question of indulgences, cares no more for one rosary than for another.

8. Our vain concupiscence is of such a nature and quality that it tries to establish itself in everything; and it is like the worm which destroys healthy wood, and works upon things both good and evil. For what else is your desire to have a rosary of cunning workmanship, and your wish that it shall be of one kind rather than of another, but the

---

<sup>660</sup>[In this and the next paragraph the Saint is more than usually personal in his approach to the reader. The word *tœ*(you) is repeated many times, and placed in emphatic positions, in a way which cannot be exactly reproduced in English.]

fixing of your rejoicing upon the instrument? It is like desiring to choose one image rather than another, and considering, not if it will better awaken Divine love within you, but only if it is more precious and more cunningly made. If you employed your desire and rejoicing solely in the love of God, you would care nothing for any of these considerations. It is most vexatious to see certain spiritual persons so greatly attached to the manner and workmanship of these instruments and motives, and to the curiosity and vain pleasure which they find in them: you will never see them satisfied; they will be continually leaving one thing for another, and forgetting and forsaking spiritual devotion for these visible things, to which they have affection and attachment, sometimes of just the same kind as that which a man has to temporal things; and from this they receive no small harm.

## CHAPTER XXXVI

*Which continues to treat of images, and describes the ignorance which certain persons have with respect to them.*

THERE is much that might be said of the stupidity which many persons display with regard to images; their foolishness reaches such a point that some of them place more confidence in one kind of image than in another, believing that God will hear them more readily because of these than because of those, even when both represent the same thing, as when there are two of Christ or two of Our Lady. And this happens because they have more affection for the one kind of workmanship than for the other; which implies the crudest ideas concerning intercourse with God and the worship and honour that are owed to Him, which has solely to do with the faith and the purity of heart of him that prays. For if God sometimes grants more favours by means of one image rather than by another of the same kind, it is not because there is more virtue to this effect in one than in another (however much difference there may be in their workmanship), but because some persons better awaken their own devotion by one than by another. If they had the same devotion for the one as for the other (or even without the use of either), they would receive the same favours from God.

2. Hence the reason for which God works<sup>661</sup> miracles and grants favours by means of one kind of image rather than by another is not that these should be esteemed more than those, but to the end that, by means of the wonder that they cause, there may be awakened sleeping devotion and the affection of the faithful for prayer. And hence it comes that, as the contemplation of the image at that time enkindles devotion and makes us to continue in prayer (both these being means whereby God hears and grants that which is asked of Him), therefore, at that time and by means of that same image, God continues to work favours and miracles because of the prayer and affection which are then shown; for it is certain that God does it not because of the image, which in itself is no more than a painted thing, but because of the devotion and faith which the person has toward the saint whom it represents. And so, if you had the same devotion and faith in Our Lady before one image representing her as before another, since the person represented is the same (and even, as we have said, if you had no such image at all), you would receive the same favours. For it is clear from

---

<sup>661</sup>[*Lit.*, 'awakens.' Cf. the use of the same metaphor below.]

experience that, when God grants certain favours and works miracles, He does so as a rule by means of certain images which are not well carved or cunningly formed or painted, so that the faithful may attribute nothing to the figure or the painting.

3. Furthermore, Our Lord is frequently wont to grant these favours by means of those images that are most remote and solitary. One reason for this is that the effort necessary to journey to them causes the affections to be increased and makes the act of prayer more earnest. Another reason is that we may withdraw ourselves from noise and from people when we pray, even as did the Lord. Wherefore he that makes a pilgrimage does well if he makes it at a time when no others are doing so, even though the time be unusual. I should never advise him to make a pilgrimage when a great multitude is doing so; for, as a rule, on these occasions, people return in a state of greater distraction than when they went. And many set out on these pilgrimages and make them for recreation rather than for devotion. Where there is devotion and faith, then, any image will suffice; but, if there is none, none will suffice. Our Saviour was a very living image in the world; and yet those that had no faith, even though they went about with Him and saw His wondrous works, derived no benefit from them. And this was the reason why, as the Evangelist says, He did few mighty works in His own country.<sup>662</sup>

4. I desire also to speak here of certain supernatural effects which are sometimes produced by certain images upon particular persons. To certain images God gives a particular spiritual influence upon such persons, so that the figure of the image and the devotion caused by it remain fixed in the mind, and the person has them ever present before him; and so, when he suddenly thinks of the image, the spiritual influence which works upon him is of the same kind as when he saw it -- sometimes it is less, but sometimes it is even greater -- yet, from another image, although it be of more perfect workmanship, he will not obtain the same spiritual effect.

5. Many persons, too, have devotion to one kind of workmanship rather than to another, and to some they will have no more than a natural inclination and affection, just as we prefer seeing one person's face to another's. And they will naturally become more attracted to a particular image, and will keep it more vividly in their imagination, even though it be not as beautiful as others, just because their nature is attracted to that kind of form and figure which it represents. And some persons will think that the affection which they have for such or such an image is devotion, whereas it will perhaps be no more than natural inclination and affection. Again, it may happen that, when they look at an image, they will see it move, or make signs and gestures and indications, or speak. This, and the variety of supernatural effects caused by images of which we have here been speaking, are, it is true, quite frequently good and true effects, produced by God either to increase devotion or so that the soul may have some support on which to lean, because it is somewhat weak, and so that it may not be distracted. Yet frequently, again, they are produced by the devil in order to cause deception and harm. We shall therefore give instruction concerning this in the chapter following.

## CHAPTER XXXVII

*Of how the rejoicing of the will must be directed, by way of the images, to God, so that*

---

<sup>662</sup>St. Luke iv, 24. [Rather St. Matthew xiii, 58 or St. Mark vi, 5.]

*the soul may not go astray because of them or be hindered by them.*

JUST as images are of great benefit for remembering God and the saints, and for moving the will to devotion when they are used in the ordinary way, as is fitting, so they will lead to great error if, when supernatural happenings come to pass in connection with them, the soul should not be able to conduct itself as is fitting for its journey to God. For one of the means by which the devil lays hold on incautious souls, with great ease, and obstructs the way of spiritual truth for them, is the use of extraordinary and supernatural happenings, of which he gives examples by means of images, both the material and corporeal images used by the Church, and also those which he is wont to fix in the fancy in relation to such or such a saint, or an image of him, transforming himself into an angel of light that he may deceive. For in those very means which we possess for our relief and help the astute devil contrives to hide himself in order to catch us when we are least prepared. Wherefore it is concerning good things that the soul that is good must ever have the greatest misgivings, for evil things bear their own testimony with them.

2. Hence, in order to avoid all the evils which may happen to the soul in this connection, which are its being hindered from soaring upward to God, or its using images in an unworthy and ignorant manner, or its being deceived by them through natural or supernatural means, all of which are things that we have touched upon above; and in order likewise to purify the rejoicing of the will in them and by means of them to lead the soul to God, for which reason the Church recommends their use, I desire here to set down only one warning, which will suffice for everything; and this warning is that, since images serve us as a motive for invisible things, we must strive to set the motive and the affection and the rejoicing of our will only upon that which in fact they represent. Let the faithful soul, then, be careful that, when he sees the image, he desire not that his senses should be absorbed by it, whether the image be corporeal or imaginary, whether beautifully made, whether richly adorned, whether the devotion that it causes be of sense or of spirit, whether it produce supernatural manifestations or no. The soul must on no account set store by these accidents, nor even regard them, but must raise up its mind from the image to that which it represents, centering the sweetness and rejoicing of its will, together with the prayer and devotion of its spirit, upon God or upon the saint who is being invoked; for that which belongs to the living reality and to the spirit should not be usurped by sense and by the painted object. If the soul do this, it will not be deceived, for it will set no store by anything that the image may say to it, nor will it occupy its sense or its spirit in such a way that they cannot travel freely to God, nor will it place more confidence in one image than in another. And an image which would cause the soul devotion by supernatural means will now do so more abundantly, since the soul will now go with its affections directly to God. For, whensoever God grants these and other favours, He does so by inclining the affection of the joy of the will to that which is invisible, and this He wishes us also to do, by annihilating the power and sweetness of the faculties with respect to these visible things of sense.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII

*Continues to describe motive good. Speaks of oratories and places dedicated to prayer.*

I THINK it has now been explained how the spiritual person may find as great imperfection in the accidents of images, by setting his pleasure and rejoicing upon them, as in other corporeal and temporal things, and perchance imperfection more perilous still. And I say perchance more perilous, because, when a person says that the objects of his rejoicing are holy, he feels more secure, and fears not to cling to them and become attached to them in a natural way. And thus such a person is sometimes greatly deceived, thinking himself to be full of devotion because he perceives that he takes pleasure in these holy things, when, perchance, this is due only to his natural desire and temperament, which lead him to this just as they lead him to other things.

2. Hence it arises (we are now beginning to treat of oratories) that there are some persons who never tire of adding to their oratories images of one kind and then of another, and take pleasure in the order and array in which they set them out, so that these oratories may be well adorned and pleasing to behold. Yet they love God no more when their oratories are ornate than when they are simple -- nay, rather do they love Him less, since, as we have said, the pleasure which they set upon their painted adornments is stolen from the living reality. It is true that all the adornment and embellishment and respect that can be lavished upon images amounts to very little, and that therefore those who have images and treat them with a lack of decency and reverence are worthy of severe reproof, as are those who have images so ill-carved that they take away devotion rather than produce it, for which reason some image-makers who are very defective and unskilled in this art should be forbidden to practise it. But what has that to do with the attachment and affection and desire which you have<sup>663</sup> for these outward adornments and decorations, when your senses are absorbed by them in such a way that your heart is hindered from journeying to God, and from loving Him and forgetting all things for love of Him? If you fail in the latter aim for the sake of the former, not only will God not esteem you for it, but He will even chasten you for not having sought His pleasure in all things rather than your own. This you may clearly gather from the description of that feast which they made for His Majesty when He entered Jerusalem. They received Him with songs and with branches, and the Lord wept;<sup>664</sup> for their hearts were very far removed from Him and they paid Him reverence only with outward adornments and signs. We may say of them that they were making a festival for themselves rather than for God; and this is done nowadays by many, who, when there is some solemn festival in a place, are apt to rejoice because of the pleasure which they themselves will find in it -- whether in seeing or in being seen, or whether in eating or in some other selfish thing -- rather than to rejoice at being acceptable to God. By these inclinations and intentions they are giving no pleasure to God. Especially is this so when those who celebrate festivals invent ridiculous and undevout things to intersperse in them, so that they may incite people to laughter, which causes them greater distraction. And other persons invent things which merely please people rather than move them to devotion.

3. And what shall I say of persons who celebrate festivals for reasons connected with their own interests? They alone, and God Who sees them, know if their regard and desire are set upon such interests rather than upon the service of God. Let them realize,

---

<sup>663</sup>[Again the Saint begins, repeatedly and emphatically, to employ the pronoun *tœ*. Cf. Bk. III, chap. xxxvi, ¶ 7, above.]

<sup>664</sup>St. Matthew xxi, 9. [Cf. St. Luke xix, 41.]

when they act in any of these ways, that they are making festivals in their own honour rather than in that of God. For that which they do for their own pleasure, or for the pleasure of men, God will not account as done for Himself. Yea, many who take part in God's festivals will be enjoying themselves even while God is wroth with them, as He was with the children of Israel when they made a festival, and sang and danced before their idol, thinking that they were keeping a festival in honour of God; of whom He slew many thousands.<sup>665</sup> Or again, as He was with the priests Nabad and Abiu, the sons of Aaron, whom He slew with the censers in their hands, because they offered strange fire.<sup>666</sup> Or as with the man that entered the wedding feast ill-adorned and ill-garbed, whom the king commanded to be thrown into outer darkness, bound hand and foot.<sup>667</sup> By this it may be known how ill God suffers these irreverences in assemblies that are held for His service. For how many festivals, O my God, are made Thee by the sons of men to the devil's advantage rather than to Thine! The devil takes a delight in them, because such gatherings bring him business, as they might to a trader. And how often wilt Thou say concerning them: 'This people honoureth Me with their lips alone, but their heart is far from Me, for they serve Me from a wrong cause!'<sup>668</sup> For the sole reason for which God must be served is that He is Who He is, and not for any other mediate ends. And thus to serve Him for other reasons than solely that He is Who He is, is to serve Him without regard for Him as the Ultimate Reason.

4. Returning now to oratories, I say that some persons deck them out for their own pleasure rather than for the pleasure of God; and some persons set so little account by the devotion which they arouse that they think no more of them than of their own secular antechambers; some, indeed, think even less of them, for they take more pleasure in the profane than in the Divine.

5. But let us cease speaking of this and speak only of those who are more particular<sup>669</sup> -- that is to say, of those who consider themselves devout persons. Many of these centre their desire and pleasure upon their oratory and its adornments, to such an extent that they squander on them all the time that they should be employing in prayer to God and interior recollection. They cannot see that, by not arranging their oratory with a view to the interior recollection and peace of the soul, they are as much distracted by it as by anything else, and will find the pleasure which they take in it a continual occasion of unrest, and more so still if anyone endeavors to deprive them of it.

## CHAPTER XXXIX

*Of the way in which oratories and churches should be used, in order to direct the spirit to God.*

WITH regard to the direction of the spirit to God through this kind of good, it is well to point out that it is certainly lawful, and even expedient, for beginners to find some sensible sweetness and pleasure in images, oratories and other visible objects of

---

<sup>665</sup>Exodus xxxii, 7-28.

<sup>666</sup>Leviticus x, 1-2.

<sup>667</sup>St. Matthew xxii, 12-13.

<sup>668</sup>St. Matthew xv, 8. [*Lit.*, 'they serve Me without cause.']

<sup>669</sup>[*Lit.*, 'that spin more finely' -- a common Spanish metaphor.]



devotion, since they have not yet weaned or detached their desire<sup>670</sup> from things of the world, so that they can leave the one pleasure for the other. They are like a child holding something in one of its hands; to make it loosen its hold upon it we give it something else to hold in the other hand lest it should cry because both its hands are empty. But the spiritual person that would make progress must strip himself of all those pleasures and desires wherein the will can rejoice, for pure spirituality is bound very little to any of those objects, but only to interior recollection and mental converse with God. So, although he makes use of images and oratories, he does so only fleetingly; his spirit at once comes to rest in God and he forgets all things of sense.

2. Wherefore, although it is best to pray where there is most decency, yet notwithstanding one should choose the place where sense and spirit are least hindered from journeying to God. Here we should consider that answer made by Our Saviour to the Samaritan woman, when she asked Him which was the more fitting place wherein to pray, the temple or the mountain, and He answered her that true prayer was not connected with the mountain or with the temple, but that those who adored the Father and were pleasing to Him were those that adored Him in spirit and in truth.<sup>671</sup> Wherefore, although churches and pleasant places are set apart and furnished for prayer (for a church must not be used for aught else), yet, for a matter as intimate as converse held with God, one should choose that place which gives sense the least occupation and the least encouragement. And thus it must not be a place that is pleasant and delectable to sense (like the places that some habitually contrive to find), for otherwise, instead of the recollection of the spirit in God, naught will be achieved save recreation and pleasure and delight of sense. Wherefore it is good to choose a place that is solitary, and even wild, so that the spirit may resolutely and directly soar upward to God, and not be hindered or detained by visible things; for, although these sometimes help to raise up the spirit, it is better to forget them at once and to rest in God. For this reason Our Saviour was wont to choose solitary places for prayer, and such as occupied the senses but little, in order to give us an example. He chose places that lifted up the soul to God, such as mountains, which are lifted up above the earth, and are ordinarily bare, thus offering no occasion for recreation of the senses.

3. The truly spiritual man, then, is never tied to a place of prayer because of its suitability in this way or in that, nor does he even consider such a thing, for, if he did so, he would still be tied to sense. But, to the end that he may attain interior recollection, and forget everything, he chooses the places most free from sensible objects and attractions, withdrawing his attention from all these, that he may be able to rejoice in his God and be far removed from all things created. But it is a remarkable thing to see some spiritual persons, who waste all their time in setting up oratories and furnishing places which please their temperaments or inclinations, yet make little account of interior recollection, which is the most important thing, but of which they have very little. If they had more of it, they would be incapable of taking pleasure in those methods and manners of devotion, which would simply weary them.

## CHAPTER XL

---

<sup>670</sup>[*Lit.*, 'their palate.']

<sup>671</sup>St. John iv, 23-4.

*Which continues to direct the spirit to interior recollection with reference to what has been said.*

THE reason, then, why some spiritual persons never enter perfectly into the true joys of the spirit is that they never succeed in raising their desire for rejoicing above these things that are outward and visible. Let such take note that, although the visible oratory and temple is a decent place set apart for prayer, and an image is a motive to prayer, the sweetness and delight of the soul must not be set upon the motive or the visible temple, lest the soul should forget to pray in the living temple, which is the interior recollection of the soul. The Apostle, to remind us of this, said: 'See that your bodies are living temples of the Holy Spirit, Who dwelleth in you.'<sup>672</sup> And this thought is suggested by the words of Christ which we have quoted, namely that they who truly adore God must needs adore Him in spirit and in truth.<sup>673</sup> For God takes little heed of your oratories and your places set apart for prayer if your desire and pleasure are bound to them, and thus you have little interior detachment, which is spiritual poverty and renunciation of all things that you may possess.

2. In order, then, to purge the will from vain desire and rejoicing in this matter, and to lead it to God in your prayer, you must see only to this, that your conscience is pure, and your will perfect with God, and your spirit truly set upon Him. Then, as I have said, you should choose the place that is the farthest withdraw and the most solitary that you can find, and devote all the rejoicing of the will to calling upon God and glorifying Him; and you should take no account of those whims about outward things, but rather strive to renounce them. For, if the soul be attached to the delight of sensible devotion, it will never succeed in passing onward to the power of spiritual delight, which is found in spiritual detachment coming through interior recollection.

## CHAPTER XLI

*Of certain evils into which those persons fall who give themselves to pleasure in sensible objects and who frequent places of devotion in the way that has been described.*

MANY evils, both interior and exterior, come to the spiritual person when he desires to follow after sweetness of sense in these matters aforementioned. For, as regards the spirit, he will never attain to interior spiritual recollection, which consists in neglecting all such things, and in causing the soul to forget all this sensible sweetness, and to enter into true recollection, and to acquire the virtues by dint of effort. As regards exterior things, he will become unable to dispose himself for prayer in all places, but will be confined to places that are to his taste; and thus he will often fail in prayer, because, as the saying goes, he can understand no other book than his own village.

2. Furthermore, this desire leads such persons into great inconstancy. Some of them never continue in one place or even always in one state: now they will be seen in one place, now in another; now they will go to one hermitage, now to another; now they will set up this oratory, now that. Some of them, again, wear out their lives in changing

---

<sup>672</sup>1 Corinthians iii, 16.

<sup>673</sup>St. John iv, 24.

from one state or manner of living to another. For, as they possess only the sensible fervour and joy to be found in spiritual things, and have never had the strength to attain spiritual recollection by the renunciation of their own will, and submitting to suffering inconveniences, whenever they see a place which they think well suited for devotion, or any kind of life or state well adapted to their temperament and inclination, they at once go after it and leave the condition or state in which they were before. And, as they have come under the influence of that sensible pleasure, it follows that they soon seek something new, for sensible pleasure is not constant, but very quickly fails.

## CHAPTER XLII

*Of three different kinds of place for devotion and of how the will should conduct itself with regard to them.*

I CAN think of three kinds of place by means of which God is wont to move the will to devotion. The first consists in certain dispositions of the ground and situation, which, by means of a pleasing effect of variety, whether obtained by the arrangement of the ground or of trees, or by means of quiet solitude, naturally awaken devotion. These places it is beneficial to use, if they at once lead the will to God and cause it to forget the places themselves, even as, in order to reach one's journey's end, it is advisable not to pause and consider the means and motive of the journey more than is necessary. For those who strive to refresh their desires and to gain sensible sweetness will rather find spiritual aridity and distraction; for spiritual sweetness and satisfaction are not found save in interior recollection.

2. When they are in such a place, therefore, they should forget it and strive to be inwardly with God, as though they were not in that place at all. For, if they be attached to the pleasure and delight of the place, as we have said, they are seeking refreshment of sense and instability of spirit rather than spiritual repose. The anchorites and other holy hermits, who in the most vast and pleasing wildernesses selected the smallest places that sufficed for them, built there the smallest cells and caves, in which to imprison themselves. Saint Benedict was in such a place for three years, and another -- namely, Saint Simon<sup>674</sup> -- bound himself with a cord that he might have no more liberty nor go any farther than to places within its reach; and even so did many who are too numerous ever to be counted. Those saints understood very clearly that, if they quenched not the desire and eagerness for spiritual sweetness and pleasure, they could not attain to spirituality.

3. The second kind is of a more special nature, for it relates to certain places (not necessarily deserts, but any places whatsoever) where God is accustomed to grant to a few special persons certain very delectable spiritual favours; ordinarily, such a place attracts the heart of the person who has received a favour there, and sometimes gives him great desires and yearnings to return to it; although, when he goes there, what happened to him before is not repeated, since this is not within his control. For God grants these favours when and how and where He pleases, without being tied to any place or time, nor to the free-will of the person to whom He grants them. Yet it is good to go and pray in such places at times if the desire is free from attachment; and this for

---

<sup>674</sup>E.p. omits: 'namely, Saint Simon.' The allusion is, of course, to Saint Simon Stylites.

three reasons. First, because although, as we said, God is not bound to any place, it would seem that He has willed to be praised by a soul in the place where He has granted it a favour. Secondly, because in that place the soul is more mindful to give thanks to God for that which it has received there. Thirdly, because, by remembering that favour, the soul's devotion is the more keenly awakened.

4. It is for these reasons that a man should go to such places, and not because he thinks that God is bound to grant him favours there, in such a way as to be unable to grant them wheresoever He wills, for the soul is a fitter and more comely place for God than any physical place. Thus we read in Holy Scripture that Abraham built an altar in the very place where God appeared to him, and invoked His holy name there, and that afterwards, coming from Egypt, he returned by the same road where God had appeared to him, and called upon God there once more at the same altar which he had built.<sup>675</sup> Jacob, too, marked the place where God had appeared to him, leaning upon a ladder, by raising there a stone which he anointed with oil.<sup>676</sup> And Agar gave a name to the place where the angel had appeared to her, and prized it highly, saying: 'Of a truth I have here seen the back of Him that seeth me.'<sup>677</sup>

5. The third kind consists of certain special places which God chooses that He may be called upon and served there, such as Mount Sinai, where He gave the law to Moses.<sup>678</sup> And the place that He showed Abraham, that he might sacrifice his son there.<sup>679</sup> And likewise Mount Horeb, where He appeared to our father Elias.<sup>680</sup>

6. The reason for which God chooses these places rather than others, that He may be praised there, is known to Himself alone. What it behoves us to know is that all is for our advantage, and that He will hear our prayers there, and also in any place where we pray to Him with perfect faith; although there is much greater opportunity for us to be heard in places dedicated to His service, since the Church has appointed and dedicated those places to that end.

## CHAPTER XLIII

*Which treats of other motives for prayer that many persons use -- namely, a great variety of ceremonies.*

THE useless joys and the imperfect attachment which many persons have to the things which we have described are perhaps to some extent excusable, since these persons act more or less innocently with regard to them. But the great reliance which some persons place in many kinds of ceremonies introduced by uninstructed persons who lack the simplicity of faith is intolerable. Let us here disregard those which bear various extraordinary names or use terms that signify nothing, and also other things that are not sacred which persons who are foolish and gross and mistrustful in spirit are wont to interpolate in their prayers. For these are clearly evil, and involve sin, and many of them

---

<sup>675</sup>Genesis xii, 8; xiii, 4.

<sup>676</sup>Genesis xxviii, 13-19.

<sup>677</sup>Genesis xvi, 13.

<sup>678</sup>Exodus xxiv, 12.

<sup>679</sup>Genesis xxii, 2.

<sup>680</sup>3 Kings [A.V., 1 Kings] xix, 8.

imply a secret compact with the devil; by such means these persons provoke God to wrath and not to mercy, wherefore I treat them not here.

2. I wish to speak solely of those ceremonies into which enters nothing of a suspicious nature, and of which many people make use nowadays with indiscreet devotion, attributing such efficacy and faith to these ways and manners wherein they desire to perform their devotions and prayers, that they believe that, if they fail to the very slightest extent in them, or go beyond their limits, God will not be served by them nor will He hear them. They place more reliance upon these methods and kinds of ceremony than upon the reality of their prayer, and herein they greatly offend and displease God. I refer, for example, to a Mass at which there must be so many candles, neither more nor fewer; which has to be said by the priest in such or such a way; and must be at such or such an hour, and neither sooner nor later; and must be after a certain day, neither sooner nor later; and the prayers and stations must be made at such and such times, with such or such ceremonies, and neither sooner nor later nor in any other manner; and the person who makes them must have such or such qualities or qualifications. And there are those who think that, if any of these details which they have laid down be wanting, nothing is accomplished.

3. And, what is worse, and indeed intolerable, is that certain persons desire to feel some effect in themselves, or to have their petitions fulfilled, or to know that the purpose of these ceremonious prayers of theirs will be accomplished. This is nothing less than to tempt God and to anger Him greatly, so much so that He sometimes gives leave to the devil to deceive them, making them feel and understand things that are far removed from the benefit of their soul, which they deserve because of the attachment that they show in their prayers, not desiring God's will, rather than their own desires, to be done therein; and thus, because they place not their whole confidence in God, nothing goes well with them.<sup>681</sup>

## CHAPTER XLIV

*Of the manner wherein the rejoicing and strength of the will must be directed to God through these devotions.*

LET these persons, then, know that, the more reliance they place on these things and ceremonies, the less confidence they have in God, and that they will not obtain of God that which they desire. There are certain persons who pray for their own ends rather than for the honour of God. Although they suppose that a thing will be done if it be for the service of God, and not otherwise, yet, because of their attachment to it and the vain rejoicing which they have in it, they multiply a large number of petitions for a thing, when it would be better for them to substitute others of greater importance to them, such as for the true cleansing of their consciences, and for a real application to things concerning their own salvation, leaving to a much later season all those other petitions of theirs which are not of this kind. And in this way they would attain that which is of the greatest importance to them, and at the same time all the other things that are good for

---

<sup>681</sup>With the last word of this chapter, which is also the last word of the page in Alc., the copy of P. Juan Evangelista comes to an end. The remainder of Alc. comes from another very early copy which, in the time of P. AndrŽs, existed at Duruelo (cf. Outline of the Life of St. John of the Cross, above).

them (although they might not have prayed for them), much better and much earlier than if they had expended all their energy on those things. For this the Lord promised, through the Evangelist, saying: 'Seek ye first and principally the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these other things shall be added unto you.'<sup>682</sup>

2. This is the seeking and the asking that is most pleasing to God, and, in order to obtain the fulfilment of the petitions which we have in our hearts, there is no better way than to direct the energy of our prayer to the thing that most pleases God. For then not only will He give that which we ask of Him, which is salvation, but also that which He sees to be fitting and good for us, although we pray not for it. This David makes clear in a psalm where he says: 'The Lord is nigh unto those that call upon Him in truth,<sup>683</sup> that beg Him for the things that are in the highest degree true, such as salvation; for of these he then says: 'He will fulfill the will of them that fear Him, and will hear their cries, and will save them. For God is the guardian of those that truly love Him.'<sup>684</sup> And thus, this nearness to God of which David here speaks is naught else than His being ready to satisfy them and grant them even that which it has not passed through their minds to ask. Even so we read that, because Solomon did well in asking God for a thing that was pleasing to Him -- namely, wisdom to lead and rule his people righteously -- God answered him, saying: 'Because more than aught else thou didst desire wisdom, and askedst not victory over thine enemies, with their deaths, nor riches, nor long life, I will not only give thee the wisdom that thou askest to rule My people righteously, but I will likewise give thee that which thou hast not asked -- namely, riches and substance and glory -- so that neither before thee nor after thee shall there be any king like unto thee.'<sup>685</sup> And this He did, giving him peace also from his enemies, so that all around him should pay tribute to him and trouble him not: We read of a similar incident in Genesis, where God promised Abraham to increase the generation of his lawful son, like the stars of Heaven, even as he had asked of Him, and said to him: 'Likewise I will increase the son of the bondwoman, for he is thy son.'<sup>686</sup>

3. In this way, then, the strength of the will and its rejoicing must be directed to God in our petitions, and we must not be anxious to cling to ceremonial inventions which are not used or approved by the Catholic Church. We must leave the method and manner of saying Mass to the priest, whom the Church sets there in her place, giving him her orders as to how he is to do it. And let not such persons use new methods, as if they knew more than the Holy Spirit and His Church. If, when they pray in their simplicity, God hears them not, let them not think that He will hear them any the more however many may be their inventions. For God is such that, if they behave towards Him as they should, and conformably to His nature, they will do with Him whatsoever they will; but, if they act from selfish ends, they cannot speak with Him.

4. With regard to further ceremonies connected with prayer and other devotions, let not the will be set upon other ceremonies and forms of prayer than those which Christ taught us.<sup>687</sup> For it is clear that, when His disciples besought Him that He would teach them to pray, He would tell them all that is necessary in order that the Eternal

---

<sup>682</sup>St. Matthew vi, 33.

<sup>683</sup>Psalms cxliv, 18 [A.V., cxlv, 18].

<sup>684</sup>Psalms cxliv, 19-20 [A.V., cxlv, 19-20].

<sup>685</sup>2 Paralipomenon [A.V., 2 Chronicles] i, 11-12.

<sup>686</sup>Genesis xxi, 13.

<sup>687</sup>St. Luke xi, 1-4.

Father may hear us, since He knew the Father's nature so well. Yet all that He taught them was the Pater Noster, with its seven petitions, wherein are included all our needs, both spiritual and temporal; and He taught them not many other kinds of prayer, either in words or in ceremonies. On the contrary, He told them that when they prayed they ought not to desire to speak much, since our heavenly Father knows well what is meet for us. He charged them only, but with great insistence, that they should persevere in prayer (that is, in the prayer of the Pater Noster), saying elsewhere: 'It behoves us always to pray and never to fail.'<sup>688</sup> But He taught not a variety of petitions, but rather that our petitions should be repeated frequently and with fervour and care. For, as I say, in them is contained all that is the will of God and all that is meet for us. Wherefore, when His Majesty drew near three times to the Eternal Father, He prayed all these three times, using those very words of the Pater Noster, as the Evangelists tell us, saying: 'Father, if it cannot be but that I must drink this cup, Thy will be done.'<sup>689</sup> And the ceremonies which He taught us to use in our prayers are only two. Either we are to pray in the secret place of our chamber, where without noise and without paying heed to any we can pray with the most perfect and pure heart, as He said in these words: 'When thou shalt pray, enter into thy chamber and shut the door and pray.'<sup>690</sup> Or else He taught us to go to a solitary and desert place, as He Himself did, and at the best and quietest time of night. And thus there is no reason to fix any limit of time, or any appointed days, or to set apart one time more than another for our devotions, neither is there any reason to use other forms, in our words and prayers, nor phrases with double meanings, but only those which the Church uses and in the manner wherein she uses them; for all are reduced to those which we have described -- namely, the Pater Noster.

5. I do not for this reason condemn -- nay, I rather approve -- the fixing of days on which certain persons sometimes arrange to make their devotions, such as novenas, or other such things. I condemn only their conduct as concerns the fixity of their methods and the ceremonies with which they practise them. Even so did Judith rebuke and reprove the people of Bethulia because they had limited God as to the time wherein they awaited His mercy, saying: 'Do ye set God a time for his mercies?' To do this, she says, is not to move God to clemency, but to awaken His wrath.<sup>691</sup>

## CHAPTER XLV

*Which treats of the second kind of distinct good, wherein the will may rejoice vainly.*

THE second kind of distinct and delectable good wherein the will may rejoice vainly is that which provokes or persuades us to serve God and which we have called provocative. This class comprises preachers, and we might speak of it in two ways, namely, as affecting the preachers themselves and as affecting their hearers. For, as regards both, we must not fail to observe that both must direct the rejoicing of their will to God, with respect to this exercise.

2. In the first place, it must be pointed out to the preacher, if he is to cause his

---

<sup>688</sup>St. Luke xviii, 1.

<sup>689</sup>St. Matthew xxvi, 39.

<sup>690</sup>St. Matthew vi, 6.

<sup>691</sup>Judith viii, 11-12.

people profit and not to embarrass himself with vain joy and presumption, that preaching is a spiritual exercise rather than a vocal one. For, although it is practised by means of outward words, its power and efficacy reside not in these but in the inward spirit. Wherefore, however lofty be the doctrine that is preached, and however choice the rhetoric and sublime the style wherein it is clothed, it brings as a rule no more benefit than is present in the spirit of the preacher. For, although it is true that the word of God is of itself efficacious, according to those words of David, 'He will give to His voice a voice of virtue,'<sup>692</sup> yet fire, which has also a virtue -- that of burning -- will not burn when the material is not prepared.

3. To the end that the preacher's instruction may exercise its full force, there must be two kinds of preparation: that of the preacher and that of the hearer; for as a rule the benefit derived from a sermon depends upon the preparation of the teacher. For this reason it is said that, as is the master, so is wont to be the disciple. For, when in the Acts of the Apostles those seven sons of that chief priest of the Jews were wont to cast out devils in the same form as Saint Paul, the devil rose up against them, saying: 'Jesus I confess and Paul I know, but you, who are ye?'<sup>693</sup> And then, attacking them, he stripped and wounded them. This was only because they had not the fitting preparation, and not because Christ willed not that they should do this in His name. For the Apostles once found a man, who was not a disciple, casting out a devil in the name of Christ, and they forbade him, and the Lord reproved them for it, saying: 'Forbid him not, for no man that has done any mighty works in My name shall be able to speak evil of Me after a brief space of time.'<sup>694</sup> But He is angry with those who, though teaching the law of God, keep it not, and, which preaching spirituality, possess it not. For this reason God says, through Saint Paul: 'Thou teachest others and teachest not thyself. Thou who preachest that men should not steal, stealest.'<sup>695</sup> And through David the Holy Spirit says: 'To the sinner, God said: "Why dost thou declare My justice and take My law in thy mouth, when thou hast hated discipline and cast My words behind thee?"'<sup>696</sup> Here it is made plain that He will give them no spirituality whereby they may bear fruit.

4. It is a common matter of observation that, so far as we can judge here below, the better is the life of the preacher, the greater is the fruit that he bears, however undistinguished his style may be, however small his rhetoric and however ordinary his instruction. For it is the warmth that comes from the living spirit that clings; whereas the other kind of preacher will produce very little profit, however sublime be his style and his instruction. For, although it is true that a good style and gestures and sublime instruction and well-chosen language influence men and produce much effect when accompanied by true spirituality, yet without this, although a sermon gives pleasure and delight to the sense and the understanding, very little or nothing of its sweetness remains in the will. As a rule, in this case, the will remains as weak and remiss with regard to good works as it was before. Although marvelous things may have been marvellously said by the preacher, they serve only to delight the ear, like a concert of music or a peal of bells; the spirit, as I say, goes no farther from its habits than before, since the voice has no virtue to raise one that is dead from his grave.

---

<sup>692</sup>Psalm lxxvii, 34 [A.V., lxxviii, 33].

<sup>693</sup>Acts xix, 15.

<sup>694</sup>St. Mark ix, 38-9.

<sup>695</sup>Romans ii, 21.

<sup>696</sup>Psalm xlix, 16-17 [A.V., l, 16-17].



5. Little does it matter that one kind of music should sound better than another if the better kind move me not more than the other to do good works. For, although marvellous things may have been said, they are at once forgotten if they have not fired the will. For, not only do they of themselves bear little fruit, but the fastening of the sense upon the pleasure that it finds in that sort of instruction hinders the instruction from passing to the spirit, so that only the method and the accidents of what has been said are appreciated, and the preacher is praised for this characteristic or for that, and followed from such motives as these rather than because of the purpose of amendment of life which he has inspired. This doctrine is well explained to the Corinthians by Saint Paul, where he says: 'I, brethren, when I came to you, came not preaching Christ with loftiness of instruction and of wisdom, and my words and my preaching consisted not in the rhetoric of human wisdom, but in the showing forth of the spirit and of the truth.'<sup>697</sup>

6. Although the intention of the Apostle here, like my own intention, is not to condemn good style and rhetoric and phraseology, for, on the contrary, these are of great importance to the preacher, as in everything else, since good phraseology and style raise up and restore things that are fallen and ruined, even as bad phraseology ruins and destroys good things . . .<sup>698</sup>

---

<sup>697</sup>1 Corinthians ii, 1-4.

<sup>698</sup>E.p. adds: 'End of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*.' The treatise thus remains incomplete, the chapter on the preacher being unfinished and no part of any chapter upon the hearer having come down to us. Further, the last two divisions of the four mentioned in Chap. xxxv, ¶ 1 are not treated in any of the MSS. or early editions.

The fragments which P. Gerardo [*Obras*, etc., I, 402-10] added to the *Ascent*, forming two chapters, cannot be considered as a continuation of this book. They are in reality a long and admirable letter [Letter XI in *The Complete Works of St. John of the Cross*: Vol. III, p. 255], written to a religious, who was one of the Saint's spiritual sons, and copied by P. Jer—nimo de San JosŽ in his *History of St. John of the Cross* (Bk. VI, Chap. vii). There is not the slightest doubt that the letter which was written at Segovia, and is fully dated, is a genuine letter, and not an editor's maltreatment of part of a treatise. Only the similarity of its subject with that of these last chapters is responsible for its having been added to the *Ascent*. It is hard to see how P. Gerardo could have been misled about a matter which is so clear.

[This question was re-opened, in 1950, by P. Sobrino (see Vol. III, p. 240), who adds TG and a codex belonging to the Discalced Carmelite Fathers of Madrid to the list of the MSS. which give the fragments as part of the *Ascent*, making six authorities in all, against which can be set only the proved and admitted reliability of P. Jer—nimo de San JosŽ. P. Sobrino, who discusses the matter (*Estudios*, etc., pp. 166-93) in great detail, hazards a plausible and attractive solution, which he reinforces with substantial evidence -- that of a 'double redaction.' According to this theory, the Saint, in writing to the religious of Letter XI, made use, for the substance of his instruction, of two fragments which were to have gone into the *Ascent*. Considering how often in his writings he doubled passages, to say nothing of whole works, it is quite understandable that he should have utilized two unincorporated, and indeed unfinished, passages for a private letter.]

## "the greatest of all mystical theologians"

Thus has Thomas Merton described St. John of the Cross, echoing the considered judgment of most authorities on the spiritual life; and here in this volume is the great mystic's most widely appealing work. *Ascent of Mount Carmel* is an incomparable guide to the spiritual life -- because its author has *lived* his own counsel. Addressed to informed Christians who aspire to grow in union with God, it examines every category of spiritual experience, the spurious as well as the authentic. With rare insight into human psychology it not only tells how to become more closely united with God, but spells out in vivid detail the pitfalls to avoid.

In his Apostolic Letter proclaiming St. John of the Cross a Doctor of the Church, Pope Pius XI wrote that he "points out to souls the way of perfection as though illumined by light from on high, in his limpidly clear analysis of mystical experience. And although [his works] deal with difficult and hidden matters, they are nevertheless replete with such lofty spiritual doctrine and are so well adapted to the understanding of those who study them that they can rightly be called a guide and handbook for the man of faith who proposes to embrace a life of perfection."

This translation by E. Allison Peers was hailed by the *London Times* as "the most faithful that has appeared in any European language."

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS was perhaps the greatest mystical writer the world has ever known. Bossuet's famous tribute -- that his writings "possess the same authority in mystical theology as the writings of St. Thomas possess in dogmatic theology" -- remains the most fitting testimonial to his august place among spiritual writers.

John was born in Castile in 1542 -- eve of Spain's century of greatness, to which he himself was to add such lustre. He studied under the Jesuits and worked for six years in a hospital. Entering the Carmelites in 1563, he was professed a year later and sent to the great University of Salamanca. He was ordained in 1567 but, shrinking from the apostolate of a priest in the world, considered entering the Carthusians, a hermitical order.

Then came the turning point in his life. He met St. Teresa of vila, who was pursuing her epic work of restoring the pristine, stricter observance of the Carmelite rule. John and two other members of the order took the vows of the Discalced (or reformed) Carmelites the following year, binding themselves to a more rigorous way of life which included daily (and nightly) recitation of the Divine Office in choir, perpetual abstinence from meat, and additional fasting.

Yet his religious vows were but a part of the rigors John was to undergo. The main branch of the order, the Calced Carmelites, so opposed the Reform that they twice had John kidnapped and jailed -- providentially, so it proved, for much of his writing was done in prison.

The greater part of his twenty-three years as a Discalced Carmelite, however, was spent in filling a number of important posts in the order, among them Rector of two colleges, Prior, Definitor, and Vicar-Provincial. But it was in one of his lesser offices that he was to spend the most decisive years of his life: he was confessor to the Carmelite nuns at vila, where St. Teresa was Superior.

The secret of St. John's unique contribution to mystical theology was not simply his mysticism, for there have been other mystics; not even his profound grasp of Scripture, dogma, Thomism, and spiritual literature, for there have also been learned mystics. What sets him apart is his extraordinary poetic vision. To write of mystical experience is to try to express the inexpressible. Because he was a great poet St. John of the Cross was able, in the realm of mysticism, to push the frontiers of human expression beyond where any writer has succeeded in venturing before or since. This poetic intensity is found even in his prose, the major works of which are *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, *Dark Night of the Soul*, *Spiritual Canticle*, and *Living Flame of Love*.

St. John of the Cross died in 1591, was beatified less than a century later in 1675, was canonized in 1726, and was named a Doctor of the Church by Pope Pius XI in 1926.





SAINT JOHN OF THE CROSS

# DARK NIGHT *of the* SOUL

*How the journey of self-denial leads to perfect union with God*



TAN • CLASSICS

# **Dark Night of the Soul**

**St. John of the Cross**

TAN Books, a division of Saint Benedict Press, LLC.

This edition has been re-typeset using the text of the 1916 edition published by Thomas Baker, London. The editors have Americanized the British spelling throughout this text and made other minor edits.

All rights reserved. With the exception of short excerpts used in articles and critical reviews, no part of this work may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in any form whatsoever, printed or electronic, without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Published with the assistance of The Livingstone Corporation. Cover and interior design by Mark Wainright, The Livingstone Corporation. Typeset by TAN Books.

Cover Image: *St. Francis of Paola* by Francesco Cappella (1714-1784); Alinari/Art Resource, NY.

13 12 11 10 9 8 7 6 5 4

[www.TANBooks.com](http://www.TANBooks.com)



TAN • CLASSICS

## DEDICATION

*To those who bear their crosses  
in the moon's dimmest light;  
that their hearts may come to see*

*Imprimatur:*  
Edm. Canon Surmont,  
Vicar General,  
Westminster, 26th March 1916



# PREFACE

**W**HY should you read *Dark Night of the Soul* ? Because it is about *your* spiritual journey. No matter what stage of spirituality you are experiencing, St. John of the Cross understands where you are and where you are going, and, through these pages, reaches out his hand to help you along. Are you a father of two, a mother of five, or a lonely widow? Are you a teacher or a student or a person in the business world? Are you a novice to spiritual studies or one who has sought the inner pilgrim's path for a long time? Are you a healthy skeptic or an open believer? It matters not. This Catholic classic applies to each and every moment of your unique and individual life.

With the revelation of Mother Teresa's 49-year-long dark night, there has been a revitalized interest in this great spiritual classic. What is a dark night? Is it a crisis of faith? Is it evidence that the Faith is a fraud, as is the claim of the renowned atheist writer, Christopher Hitchens? Why give yourself to God if misery is all that is returned? But critics such as Hitchens, and even little parts of you and me, forget that nothing great comes without sacrifice.

We all suffer. Yet few of us suffer in the way of Job, St. John of the Cross, or Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Most of us do not experience a mystical dark night, but we experience the everyday, run-of-the-mill dark moment. This dark moment could be the feeling of loneliness, depression, or being unappreciated; it could be suffering from financial difficulty, discomfort at work, or simply not knowing how to parent a rebellious child; it could be that awful experience of terminal illness, of a broken marriage, or even the death of a child.

About a year ago, my wife and I learned about a good Christian family whose two-year-old son, Jude, had fallen into a swimming pool and drowned. Jude was placed on life-support for nearly two weeks until the doctors assured the parents that Jude had become brain-dead due to lack of oxygen. His parents then allowed him to go home to his eternal reward. I do not know if Jude's parents are saintly people experiencing the *mystical* dark night of St. John of the Cross, but I do know that they experienced many *natural* dark nights during that time, and I imagine they will continue to have many, many more.

I believe that St. John of the Cross would agree that there is similarity between his dark night and a natural dark night, such as losing a child. As Catholics, we believe that grace builds upon nature, that the Creator of this natural world permeates each and every moment, presenting us with a million moments that can become sacramental. While people experience God in different ways, the similarity is that God Himself is being experienced. The question is not whether you experience Him in a mystical or more common way; the real question is how you respond to His presence, or His perceived absence, in your daily life. Do you allow the dark moments to smother your faith, or do you turn to God in prayer, begging for patience, for strength, and for a renewed faith? Is your faith so shallow as to love God only when you get something in return, or do you love Him despite the darkness that comes and goes? These are the questions the saints had to face during their dark nights, and these are the questions that you must ask yourself in your dark moments.

This Catholic classic has given comfort and hope to countless people for over 430 years. It will take you on a journey through the spiritual life of a person striving for holiness. The work is separated into two parts: Book One, *Of the Night of Sense*, and Book Two, *Of the Night of the Spirit*. Most of us will find the descriptions in Book One most applicable, for most of us are still struggling with overcoming spiritual dependence on our senses. But do not think that Book Two is only for the holiest of holy people; on the contrary, it provides us with a preview of what is to come as we grow closer to our Lord.

The overriding theme of *Dark Night of the Soul* is that the suffering you endure, no matter what stage of life you are in, is an opportunity to purify yourself. Whether the purgation comes from the natural course of things, or whether it comes from a more supernatural experience, God is calling you forward to walk with discomfort, with pain, and with suffering, so that you learn to depend entirely on Him. No longer depend on yourself! No longer depend on the pleasant feelings received from Him! Love Him not for what you experience Him to be, but for Who He Is!

Like a mother who takes small steps away from her child learning to walk, God also steps away, all the while calling you towards Him. He has not turned his back on you. Rather, He wants you to love Him and walk towards Him without constant dependence on your own standards of pleasure, peace, and happiness. Only then, when you are empty, can He fill you with His very own pleasure, peace, and happiness. And then you will wonder why you ever questioned Him, why you ever desired anything other than Him, and why you ever hesitated to endure the purgation required to become one with Him.

*J. Conor Gallagher  
Director of Publishing  
Pentecost Sunday, 2008*

# CONTENTS

PREFACE

INTRODUCTION

## BOOK ONE

*Of the Night of Sense*

CHAPTER ONE

Begins with the first stanza and treats of the imperfections of beginners.

CHAPTER TWO

Of some spiritual imperfections to which beginners are liable in the matter of pride.

CHAPTER THREE

Of the imperfections into which some beginners are wont to fall, in the matter of the second capital sin, which is avarice, in the spiritual sense.

CHAPTER FOUR

Of other imperfections into which some beginners are wont to fall, in the matter of the third sin, which is luxury, spiritually understood.

CHAPTER FIVE

Of the imperfections of beginners in the matter of anger.

CHAPTER SIX

Of the imperfections in the matter of spiritual gluttony.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Of the imperfections in the matter of envy and spiritual sloth.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Explanation of the first line of the first stanza. Beginning of the explanation of the dark night.

CHAPTER NINE

Of the signs by which it may be known that the spiritual man is walking in the way of this night or purgation of sense.

CHAPTER TEN

How they are to conduct themselves who have entered the dark night.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Stanza I.

CHAPTER TWELVE

Of the benefits which the night of sense brings to the soul.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Of other benefits which the night of sense brings to the soul.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN  
The last line of the first stanza explained.

BOOK TWO  
*Of the Night of the Spirit*

CHAPTER ONE  
The Second Night; that of the spirit. When it begins.

CHAPTER TWO  
Of certain imperfections of proficients.

CHAPTER THREE  
Notes on that which is to follow.

CHAPTER FOUR  
Explanation of the first stanza.

CHAPTER FIVE  
Explains how this dim contemplation is not a night only, but pain and torment also for the soul.

CHAPTER SIX  
Of other sufferings of the soul in this night.

CHAPTER SEVEN  
The same subject continued. Other afflictions and trials of the will.

CHAPTER EIGHT  
Of other sufferings which distress the soul in this state.

CHAPTER NINE  
How this night enlightens the mind, though it brings darkness over it.

CHAPTER TEN  
Explanation of this purgation by a comparison.

CHAPTER ELEVEN  
Begins the explanation of the second line of the first stanza, and shows how a vehement passion of divine love is the fruit of these sharp afflictions of the soul.

CHAPTER TWELVE  
Shows how this awful night is a purgatory, and how in it the divine wisdom illuminates men on earth with that light in which the angels are purified and enlightened in heaven.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN  
Other sweet effects wrought in the soul in the dark night of contemplation.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN  
Repeats and explains the last three lines of the first stanza.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN  
The second stanza and its explanation.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN  
Shows how the soul journeys securely when in darkness.

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN  
Gives the second line and explains how this dim contemplation is secret.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN  
Shows how this secret wisdom is also a ladder.

CHAPTER NINETEEN  
Begins the explanation of the ten degrees of the mystic ladder according to St. Bernard and St. Thomas.

CHAPTER TWENTY  
Of the other five degrees.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE  
The meaning of “disguised.” The colors in which the soul disguises itself in this night.

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO  
Explains the third line of the second stanza. Happiness of the soul in having overcome its enemies.

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE  
Explains the fourth line—describes the wonderful hiding place of the soul in this night, and how the devil, though he enters other most secret places, enters not this.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR  
Concludes the explanation of the second stanza.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE  
In which the third stanza is briefly explained.

# INTRODUCTION

THE Dark Night, though only a short treatise in comparison with the remaining works of St. John of the Cross, is perhaps from a practical point of view the most important of the whole series. Instructions for beginners may be found in abundance; even the Night of the sense, as St. John informs us,<sup>1</sup> has had numerous exponents; but in the Night of the spirit he breaks fresh ground. If it is one of God's ordinances that all spiritual life must be regulated by a director so that pitfalls may be avoided, a soul plunged into the Night of the spirit depends more than any other upon the intelligent guidance of an experienced director, partly on account of its natural reluctance to proceed along a path beset with so many difficulties, partly because the very fact of its being in darkness prevents it from seeing clearly with its own eyes. In the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night* St. John has traced the way with admirable lucidity and simplicity, but these books, especially the latter, are chiefly addressed to the director. It is impossible to read them without gaining the conviction that his is the absolutely safe way; there may be others, less straight, less rugged, but neither so safe nor so direct.

St. John, taking his position on the firm basis of the psychology and theology of St. Thomas Aquinas, and guiding himself by the light of Holy Scripture, pitilessly dissects the soul and its operations, separating not only what is dangerous or unsound, but everything that is not directly conducive to his ultimate aim, the union of the human will with the holy will of God. A work of this magnitude must be begun by God, and accomplished by Him. The beginning consists in the grace of vocation, the end in the beatific vision. Between these two there lies a vast distance which it takes a lifetime to cover, where the generous and intelligent co-operation of the soul is indispensable. This is partly active, and consists in the systematic denial of everything that could give satisfaction to body or soul, as explained in the *Ascent*; and partly passive (as shown in the *Dark Night*), where the soul assists God's operation by submitting to His chastising hand, like a patient under the knife of the surgeon.

The number of souls called to the contemplative life in its widest sense is even nowadays greater than is commonly supposed. They are not confined to Religious Orders, but are to be found in every station of life, and in every country, for "the spirit breatheth where it will." Many proceed no farther than the initial stages; few persevere as far as the spiritual night; while those who attain to perfection are but exceptions. "Many praise and bless Jesus as long as they receive some consolation from Him, but if He hide Himself and leave them for a little while, they fall either into complaining or into excessive dejection."<sup>2</sup> This general falling off may be partly attributed to a want of understanding and guidance which St. John in the book before us undertakes to remedy.

It may be useful for some readers of St. John's works to find here a short sketch of the experiences a soul generally makes on its journey through the realms of Mysticism. Let us suppose that it has been unexpectedly struck by a ray of divine grace. It may never really have been estranged from God since the day of baptism, or it may have strayed; no essential difference would result there from, because motion is determined not so much by the direction whence it proceeds but whither it tends. Such a soul, then, finds a delight, hitherto unknown, in spiritual matters; a new chord has been touched and set vibrating, the whole world seems transfigured, God's work becomes visible and palpable in every blade of grass, His interests absorb all earthly pursuits; the human heart has found and holds fast a treasure of incomparable value; heaven has descended upon earth. "This is he that heareth the word and immediately receiveth it with joy." Such an experience is indeed a great grace, but it does not last. True spirituality consists not in sentiments but in the exercise of virtue. The first impulse is not strong enough to carry the soul very far in its flight heavenwards. The question arises how best to utilize this initial motive power? St. John gives the answer in the *Ascent*. Almost ruthlessly he tears off the brilliant surface so as to save the substance. The first ray has indeed transfigured the heart but has not transformed it. There remain many dangerous germs, the weaknesses and shortcomings of human nature. The very warmth of paradise, the dew descending abundantly upon a tender heart, might develop these so that "the last state of that man is made worse than the first." They must, therefore, be destroyed by a long process of self-denial. St. John teaches the beginner how to mortify his senses and faculties, sacrificing even much that in itself is good, in order to strengthen the soul by the simple exercise of Faith, Hope, and Charity, and the four cardinal virtues. This is the active purgation.

But this represents only the smaller portion of the work to be done. However, it prepares the way for Him who "searcheth the reins and hearts." The passive purgation follows closely upon, and sometimes accompanies the former. The passive purgation of the sense is not merely a reaction from the exultation of the first awakening to spiritual life, it cuts far deeper. Were it only a reaction it would end in lukewarmness, but he who is being tried by God, so far from growing indifferent, becomes the more diligent in seeking God, the more God appears to hide Himself, for he feels His absence keenly. "It is a great thing," says the author of the *Imitation*, forestalling St. John of the Cross, "a very great thing to be able to do without all solace, both human and divine, and to be willing to bear this exile of the heart for the honor of God, and in nothing

seek self, and not to have regard to one's own merit. What great thing is it to be cheerful and devout when grace comes to thee? This is an hour desirable to all.”<sup>3</sup>

This purgation of the sense comes in different ways, such as reverses of fortune, loss of friendship, loss of one's reputation, ill success in one's undertakings, illness, and the whole train of temporal misfortunes. It is always accompanied by the loss of sensible devotion. To keep still under the chastising hand of God elevates the soul to the plane where the holy man Job stood. If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil? The active purgation through which the soul has passed under the guidance of St. John of the Cross is the best preparation for this passive purgation of sense, for there it has learnt to utterly despise all comfort.

Far more terrible, as our author tells us, is the passive purgation of the spirit which reaches “unto the division of the soul and the spirit, of the joints also and the marrow.” Of course there are different degrees, all souls are not tried to the same extent, and St. John takes rather an extreme case. In the most acute form, then, positive Satanic interference adds to the distress of a soul already weighed down by a feeling of the loss of God. Sometimes it takes the shape of a spirit of blasphemy, or of uncleanness or despair. The lives of the Saints furnish some remarkable instances of such trials. St. Mary Magdalen de Pazzi was subject to them for five years. St. Francis de Sales was; for a long time, haunted by the thought that he should be finally lost. The effect it had upon him was to render him extremely conscientious so that he should offend God not even in small matters, and that his loss should not come through his own fault. “Although He should kill me I will trust Him; but yet I will reprove my ways in His sight.”

It stands to reason that a soul under such trials is absolutely dependent upon the guidance of a learned and experienced director. Otherwise the result might be fatal. In fact there is reason to think that some of the appalling falls from spiritual height to utter perversion should be attributed to the absence of proper direction during this most dangerous period.

The purpose of these trials is, however, not to throw the soul into despair but to wean it from all comfort so as to leave it with no other support than God Himself, as St. John says in one of his poems:

My soul is detached  
From every thing created,  
And raised above itself  
Into a life delicious,  
Of God alone supported.  
And therefore I will say,  
That what I most esteem  
Is that my soul is now  
Without support, and with support.<sup>4</sup>

Or, as it is expressed in some verses attributed to him:

On Mount Carmel God alone and I.  
God alone in my spirit to enlighten it,  
God alone in my acts to sanctify them,  
God alone in my heart to possess it.

This is one of the objects of the passive purgation. Sooner or later every soul must pass through it. All that is of earth earthly will have to be left on one side before that which is of heaven heavenly shall appear. The process is under all circumstances a painful one, but it is unavoidable. St. John assists the soul in stripping itself, and allowing itself to be stripped here below. He calls this a purgatory, but a very different one from what awaits the soul after death, inasmuch as there the soul is cleansed by fire, and here by love. Moreover, the perfect purgation of the soul in the present life leaves it free to act with infinitely greater power, and therefore to gain innumerable merits, whereas after death the account is closed before even the soul enters purgatory. No power on earth could resist a thoroughly detached soul—it might almost be said to participate in God's omnipotence. Here lies the secret of the marvelous deeds of so many Saints.

There is one other reason why the soul should pass through the trials of the Dark Night. Its ultimate destiny is union with God. Now the soul is finite, and God is infinite. The disproportion between the two is so enormous (being, in fact, infinite in itself) that the mere comparison must have a crushing effect upon the finite being. Every soul will have to pass through this

experience, the minority already in this life in the dark Night of contemplation, the vast majority on leaving this life, when they will suddenly find themselves encompassed by the infinite Majesty and Power of the Godhead. When the finite comes into contact with the infinite it realizes its utter nothingness; it is humbled to the ground. The contrast causes it the most intense pain. This thorough humiliation makes it possible for the infinitesimal to be united to the infinite, for, as Christ says, "he who humbleth himself shall be exalted."

An important point clearly established by St. John is the length of the trial. This depends, no doubt, on many circumstances—on the thoroughness of the purgation, on the amount of co-operation on the part of the soul, probably also on the kind of imperfections to be removed; the more subtle these are the more difficult are they to eradicate. But on the whole it is not probable that a soul would remain plunged in deep darkness for many weeks together, without being comforted and strengthened by at least some passing rays of light, some consolation to give it courage. Perhaps a very strong soul would require but few interruptions of this kind, but, excepting some highly favored souls, an alternation of glimpses of light and deep shadows seems to be the more usual experience. On this condition the Dark Night may continue for several years, and may even be repeated in different degrees of intensity. It is necessary to bear this in mind, for the study of mystical works sometimes leaves the impression that the various experiences follow each other in regular and rapid succession, and that there can be no turning back unless it be a falling away.

As the soul enters the Dark Night gradually so it emerges from it by degrees. Both in the *Ascent* and in the work before us St. John proceeds so far as the dawn of a new and glorious day. Of the full noonday he treats in the *Spiritual Canticle* and the *Living Flame of Love*. There the will is firmly united with the Will of God, the only kind of permanent union between man and God possible in this life. It is the height of perfection and so far above ordinary human experience that mystical writers, St. John included, have found it necessary to use expressions of oriental exuberance, the ordinary language being quite inadequate to describe the happy condition of a soul arrived at this state. It stands in marked contrast with the almost grim sobriety of the expositions in the *Ascent* and the *Dark Night*. Those who wish to form an opinion of the character of St. John should study both categories of his writings, otherwise he would appear to some as a stern, morose taskmaster, with never a smile on his lips, and to others as a dreamer of phantastic dreams, whereas he was a Saint with a wide heart and intense love, a most passionate love of his God, and, for God's sake, of his neighbor; and, with all that, a man of practical work and common sense.

It is hardly necessary to say much on the charge of Quietism brought sometimes against St. John of the Cross. The matter was fully investigated at the time of his beatification and canonization. Had there been the slightest foundation for it the process would have been allowed to drop; but as the charge has been repeated by some writers, a word in reply may not be superfluous. According to St. John, the soul while plunged into the Dark Night can do nothing, but must leave God free to act. It is passive, but not inert; by submitting to the Divine operation it co-operates in the measure of its power. But in all other states, notably in the active purgation of the *Ascent*, the soul concentrates the utmost energy of all its powers on the one great work. We have seen there how St. John expects it to leave no recess of the heart or mind unexplored and undisturbed. Considering that it costs us infinitely more to free ourselves from those things for which we have, sometimes unconsciously, an attraction, than from what is alien to our nature, it will be seen that so far from tending to Quietism St. John's teaching exacts an amount of co-operation on the part of man that will probably surprise most readers. If, as it seems reasonable to think, the active purgation goes hand in hand with the passive purgation, and should continue not only while the latter lasts, but to the end of life, there can be no question of a passive repose of the soul on the plea that God is working in the interior. Moreover, the state of perfection admits of no relaxation from work; besides the good works which will follow necessarily from the union of the human with the Divine Will, the highest contemplation is in itself an unfolding of all the powers of the soul, just as the Beatific vision is not a passive enjoyment but an operation of a soul lifted far above itself by the light of glory in the intellect and a new capacity for love in the will.

Fr. Benedict Zimmerman, O.C.D.  
St. Luke's Priory, Wincanton, Somerset.  
May 1, 1907

*With an explanation of the stanzas comprising the way of the perfect union of love with God, such as is possible in this life; and the admirable endowments of the soul which has attained to it*

*Argument*

THE stanzas to be explained are set forth at the beginning of this book, then an explanation of each severally, the stanza being placed before it. After that an explanation of each line, which is also set before the explanation. The first two stanzas explain the two spiritual purgations of the sensual and spiritual part of man, and the other six the various and admirable effects of the spiritual enlightenment and union of love with God.

*Stanzas*

I.

In a dark night,  
With anxious love inflamed,  
O, happy lot!  
Forth unobserved I went,  
My house being now at rest.

II.

In darkness and in safety,  
By the secret ladder, disguised,  
O, happy lot!  
In darkness and concealment,  
My house being now at rest,

III.

In that happy night,  
In secret, seen of none,  
Seeing nought myself,  
Without other light or guide  
Save that which in my heart was burning.



IV.

That light guided me  
More surely than the noonday sun  
To the place where He was waiting for me,  
Whom I knew well, And where none appeared.

V.

O, guiding night;  
O, night more lovely than the dawn;  
O, night that hast united  
The lover with His beloved,  
And changed her into her love.

VI.

On my flowery bosom,  
Kept whole for Him alone,  
There He reposed and slept;  
And I cherished Him, and the waving  
Of the cedars fanned Him.

VII.

As His hair floated in the breeze<sup>5</sup>  
That from the turret blew,  
He struck me on the neck  
With His gentle hand,  
And all sensation left me.

VIII.

I continued in oblivion lost,  
My head was resting on my love;  
Lost to all things and myself,  
And, amid the lilies forgotten,  
Threw all my cares away.

**B**EFORE we enter on an explanation of these, it is right we should understand that they are the words of the soul already in the state of perfection, which is the union of love with God, when it has gone through the straits, tribulations and severities, by means of the spiritual training, of the strait way of everlasting life, by which ordinarily the soul attains to this high and divine union with God. Of it our Savior says in the Gospel,<sup>6</sup> “How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it.” This road being so strait, and they who find it being so few, the soul regards it as a great and joyful blessing that it has journeyed on it to the perfection of love, as it sings in the first stanza, very rightly calling the strait road a dark night, as may be seen further on in the words of the stanza. The soul, therefore, rejoicing in that it has traveled on this strait road whereby so great a blessing has come to it, sings as follows.

*In a dark night,  
With anxious love inflamed,  
O, happy lot!  
Forth unobserved I went,  
My house being now at rest.*

**I**N THE first stanza the soul sings of the way and manner of its going forth, as to its affections, from self and all created things, dying thereto by real mortification, that it may live the life of love, sweet and delicious in God. It went forth, from itself and from all things, in a dark night, by which is meant here purgative contemplation—as I shall hereinafter explain<sup>7</sup>—which causes in the soul passive denial of self<sup>8</sup> and of all besides. This departure, it says, it was able to accomplish in the strength and fervor which the love of the Bridegroom supplied, in the obscure contemplation for that end. The soul magnifies its own happiness in having journeyed Godwards in that night so successfully as to escape all hindrance on the part of its three enemies—the world, the devil, and the flesh—which are always found infesting this road; for the night of purgative contemplation had lulled to sleep and mortified, in the house of sensuality, all passions and desires, in their rebellious movements.

# BOOK ONE

## *Of the Night of Sense*

*Begins with the First Stanza and Treats of the Imperfections of Beginners*

*1. Three states: beginners, proficient and perfect. 2. Beginners encouraged by sweetness. 3. Continuation. 4. Selfish spirituality of beginners. Work proportioned to habit. 5. Imperfections.*

*In a Dark Night*

SOULS begin to enter the dark night when God is drawing them out of the state of beginners, which is that of those who meditate on the spiritual road, and is leading them into that of proficient, the state of contemplatives, that, having passed through it, they may arrive at the state of the perfect, which is that of the divine union with God. That we may the better understand and explain the nature of this night through which the soul has to pass, and why God leads men into it, it may be well to touch first upon certain peculiarities of beginners, which, though treated in the briefest possible way, it is well for them to know,<sup>1</sup> that they may perceive the weakness of the state they are in, take courage, and desire to be led of God into this night, where the soul is established in virtue and made strong for the inestimable delights of His love. Though I shall dwell at some length upon this point, I shall do so no longer than suffices for the immediate discussion of this dark night.

2. We are to keep in mind that a soul, when seriously converted to the service of God, is, in general, spiritually nursed and caressed, as an infant by its loving mother, who warms it in her bosom, nourishes it with her own sweet milk, feeds it with tender and delicate food, carries it in her arms, and fondles it. But as the child grows up the mother withholds her caresses, hides her breasts, and anoints them with the juice of bitter aloes; she carries the infant in her arms no longer, but makes it walk on the ground, so that, losing the habits of an infant, it may apply itself to greater and more substantial pursuits.

3. The grace of God,<sup>2</sup> like a loving mother, as soon as the soul is regenerated in the new fire and fervor of His service, treats it in the same way; for it enables it, without labor on its own part, to find its spiritual milk, sweet and delicious, in all the things of God, and in devotional exercises great sweetness; God giving it the breasts of His own tender love, as to a tender babe. Such souls, therefore, delight to spend many hours, and perhaps whole nights, in prayer; their pleasures are penances, their joy is fasting, and their consolations lie in the use of the sacraments and in speaking of divine things.

4. Now spiritual men generally, speaking spiritually, are extremely weak and imperfect here, though they apply themselves to devotion, and practice it with great resolution, earnestness, and care. For being drawn to these things and to their spiritual exercises by the comfort and satisfaction they find therein, and not yet confirmed in virtue by the struggle it demands, they fall into many errors and imperfections in their spiritual life; for every man's work corresponds to the habit of perfection which he has acquired. These souls, therefore, not having had time to acquire those habits of vigor, must, of necessity, perform their acts, like children, weakly.

5. To make this more clear, and to show how weak are beginners in virtue in those good works which they perform with so much ease and pleasure, I proceed to explain by reference to the seven capital sins, pointing out some of the imperfections into which beginners fall in the matter of each of them. This will show us plainly how like children they are in all they do, and also how great are the blessings of this dark night of which I am about to speak;<sup>3</sup> seeing that it cleanses and purifies the soul from all these imperfections.

*Of Some Spiritual Imperfections to Which Beginners Are Liable in the Matter of Pride*

*1. First imperfection: spiritual pride. 2. Fed by Satan. 3. Rebellion against confessors. 4. Deceitful confessions. 5. Pride of impatience with self. 6. Continuation. 7. Conduct of the humble beginner. 8–10. Marks of true, simple spirituality. 11. How the humble man bears his own imperfections.*

WHEN beginners become aware of their own fervor and diligence in their spiritual works and devotional exercises, this prosperity of theirs gives rise to secret pride—though holy things tend of their own nature to humility—because of their imperfections; and the issue is that they conceive a certain satisfaction in the contemplation of their works and of themselves. From the same source, too, proceeds that empty eagerness which they display to some extent, and occasionally very much,<sup>1</sup> in speaking before others of the spiritual life, and sometimes as teachers rather than learners. They condemn others in their heart when they see that they are not devout in their way. Sometimes also they say it in words, showing themselves herein to be like the Pharisee, who in the act of prayer boasted of his own works and despised the Publican.<sup>2</sup>

2. Their fervor, and desire to do these and other works, is frequently fed by Satan in order that they may grow in pride and presumption: he knows perfectly well that all their virtue and works are not only nothing worth, but rather tending to sin. Some of them go so far as to desire none should be thought good but themselves,<sup>3</sup> and so, at all times, both in word and deed fall into condemnation and detraction of others. They see the mote in the eye of their brother, but not the beam which is in their own.<sup>4</sup> They strain out the gnat in another man's cup, and swallow the camel in their own.<sup>5</sup>

3. Sometimes, also, when their spiritual masters, such as confessors and superiors, do not approve of their spirit and conduct—for they wish to be praised and considered for what they do—they decide that they are not understood, and that their superiors are not spiritual men because they do not approve and sanction their proceedings. So they go about in quest of some one else, who will accommodate himself to their fancy; for in general they love to discuss their spiritual state with those who, they think, will commend and respect it. They avoid, as they would death, those who destroy their delusion with the view of leading them into a safe way, and sometimes they even hate them. Presuming greatly on themselves, they make many resolutions, and accomplish little. They are occasionally desirous that others should perceive their spirituality and devotion, and for that end they give outward tokens by movements, sighs and divers ceremonies; sometimes, too, they fall into certain trances in public rather than in private—whereunto Satan contributes—and are pleased when others are witnesses of them.

4. Many of them seek to be the favorites of their confessors, and the result is endless envy and disquietude. They are ashamed to confess their sins plainly, lest their confessors should think less of them, so they go about palliating them, that they may not seem so bad; which is excusing rather than accusing themselves. Sometimes they go to a stranger to confess their sin, that their usual confessor may think they are not sinners, but good people. And so they always take pleasure in telling him of their goodness, and that in terms suggestive of more than is in them: at the least, they wish all their goodness to be appreciated, when it would be greater humility on their part, as I shall presently show,<sup>6</sup> to undervalue it, and wish that neither their confessor nor anyone else should think it of the least importance.

5. Some beginners, too, make light of their faults, and at other times indulge in immoderate grief when they commit them. They thought themselves already saints, and so they become angry and impatient with themselves, which is another great imperfection. They also importune God to deliver them from their faults and imperfections, but it is for the comfort of living in peace, unmolested by them, and not for God; they do not consider that, were He to deliver them, they would become, perhaps, prouder than ever. They are great enemies of other men's praise, but great lovers of their own, and sometimes they seek it. In this respect they resemble the foolish virgins, who, when their lamps gave no light, went about in search of oil, saying: "Give us of your oil, for our lamps are going out."<sup>7</sup>

6. From these some go on to very serious imperfections, and come to great harm thereby. Some, however, fall into them less than others, and some have to contend with little more than the first movements of them. But scarcely anyone can be found

who, in his first fervors, did not fall into some of them.

7. But those who at this time are going on to perfection proceed in a very different way, and in a very different temper of mind: they grow and are built up in humility, not only looking on their own works as nothing, but also dissatisfied with themselves; they look upon all others as much better, they regard them with a holy envy in their anxiety to serve God as they do. For the greater their fervor, the more numerous their good works; and the keener the pleasure therein, the more they perceive—for they humble themselves—how much that is which God deserves at their hands, and how little is all they can do for Him; thus the more they do, the less are they satisfied.

8. So great is that which they in their love would fain do, that all they are doing seems nothing. This loving anxiety so importunes and fills them that they never consider whether others are doing good or not, and if they do, it is, as I have said, in the conviction that all others are much better than they are. They think little of themselves, and wish others to do so also, to make no account of them and despise their works. Moreover, if anyone should praise and respect them they will give them no credit, for they think it strange that anybody should speak well of them.

9. They, in great tranquility and humility, are very desirous to learn the things that are profitable to them from anyone; in this respect the very opposite of those of whom I have just spoken, who are willing to teach everybody; and who, when anyone seems about to teach them anything, take the words out of his mouth, as if they knew it already.

10. But they of whom I am now speaking are very far from wishing to instruct anyone; they are most ready to travel by another road if they be but commanded, for they never imagine that they can be right in any thing. When others are praised they rejoice, and their only regret is that they do not serve God themselves as well as they. They have no wish to speak about their own state, for they think so lightly of it, that they are ashamed to speak of it to their own confessors; it seems to them unworthy of any mention whatever. But they have a great desire to speak of their shortcomings and sins, which they would rather have known than their virtues:<sup>8</sup> thus they incline to treat of the affairs of their soul with those who have no great opinion of their state and spirit.<sup>9</sup> This is a characteristic of that spirituality which is pure, simple, true, and most pleasing unto God. For as the wise Spirit of God dwells in these humble souls, He moves and inclines them to keep His treasures secretly within, and to cast out the evil. For God gives this grace, together with the other virtues, to the humble, and withholds it from the proud.

11. These will give their hearts' blood for him who serves God, and will help him to serve Him to the utmost of their powers. When they fall into any imperfection they bear up under it with humility, in meekness of spirit, in loving fear of God, and hoping in Him. But the souls who in the beginning travel thus towards perfection are, as I said,<sup>10</sup> few, yea, very few, and we ought to be content when they do not rush into the opposite evils. This is the reason, as I shall hereafter explain,<sup>11</sup> why God leads into the dark night those souls whom He will purify from all these imperfections in order to their further progress.

***Of the Imperfections into Which Some Beginners Are Wont to Fall, in the Matter of the Second Capital Sin, Which Is Avarice, in the Spiritual Sense***

*1. Spiritual avarice. 2. Real devotion must spring from the heart. 3. Two examples of the spirit of poverty. 4. The humble man begins with generosity. 5. Real perfection; God alone can make Saints.*

**M**ANY a beginner also falls at times into great spiritual avarice. Scarcely anyone is contented with that measure of the spirit which God gives; they are very disconsolate and querulous because they do not find the comfort they desire in spiritual things. Many are never satisfied with listening to spiritual counsels and precepts, with reading books which treat of their state; and they spend more time in this than in doing their duty, having no regard to that mortification, and perfection of interior poverty of spirit to which they ought to apply themselves. Besides, they load themselves with images, rosaries, and crucifixes, curious and costly; now taking up one, then another, now changing them, and then resuming them again. At one time they will have them of a certain fashion, at another time of another, prizing one more than another because it is more curious or costly. Some may be seen with an Agnus Dei, and with relics and medals, like children with coral.

2. I condemn here that attachment and clinging of the heart to the form, number, and variety of these things, because in direct opposition to poverty of spirit, which looks only to the substance of devotion; which makes use indeed of these things, but only sufficiently for the end, and disdains that variety and curiosity, for real devotion must spring out of the heart, and consider only the truth and substance which the objects in question represent. All beyond this is attachment and greed of imperfection; he who will go on unto perfection, must root out that feeling utterly.

3. I knew a person who for more than ten years used continually, without interruption, a cross rudely formed of a piece of blessed palm, and fastened together with a common pin bent backwards, until I took it away. This was a person not deficient in sense and understanding. I knew another who had a rosary made of the backbones of fish, and whose devotion, I am certain, was not on that account of less value in the eyes of God; for it is clear that the cost or workmanship of these contributed nothing to it.

4. Those beginners, therefore, who go on well, do not rely on visible instruments, neither do they burden themselves with them, nor do they seek to know more than is necessary for acting rightly; their sole object is to be well with God and to please Him; their avarice consists in that. With a noble generosity they give up all they possess; and their delight is to be poor for the love of God and their neighbor, whether in matters spiritual or temporal;<sup>1</sup> because, as I have said, their sole aim is real perfection, to please God in all things and themselves in nothing.

5. The soul, however, cannot be perfectly purified from these imperfections, any more than from the others, until God shall have led it into the passive purgation of the dark night, of which I shall speak immediately.<sup>2</sup> But it is expedient that the soul, so far as it can, should labor, on its own part, to purify and perfect itself, that it may merit from God to be taken under His divine care, and be healed from those imperfections which of itself it cannot remedy. For, after all the efforts of the soul, it cannot by any exertions of its own actively purify itself so as to be in the slightest degree fit for the divine union of perfection in the love of God, if God Himself does not take it into His own hands and purify it in the fire, dark to the soul, in the way I am going to explain.<sup>3</sup>

*Of Other Imperfections into Which Some Beginners Are Wont to Fall, in the Matter of the Third Sin, Which Is Luxury, Spiritually Understood*

*1. Spiritual luxury. 2. Continuation. 3. First source: sensible sweetness. 4. Law of the flesh and of the spirit. 5. Second source: the devil. 6. Continuation. 7. Third source: fear. 8. Continuation. 9. Test of purely spiritual affection. 10. Difference between human and divine love; in the Dark Night the affections are ruled by reason.*

MANY beginners fall into other imperfections, over and above those belonging to each capital sin of which I am speaking. I pass them by now, to avoid prolixity, and treat of some of the chiefest, which are, as it were, the source and origin of the rest.

2. As to the sin of luxury, putting aside the commission of the sin—my object being to speak of those imperfections which have to be purged away in the dark night—beginners fall into many imperfections, which may be called spiritual luxury; not that it is so in fact, but because, originating in spiritual things,<sup>1</sup> it is felt and experienced sometimes in the flesh, because of its frailty, when the soul is the recipient of spiritual communications. For very often, in the midst of their spiritual exercises, and when they cannot help themselves, the impure movements and disturbances<sup>2</sup> of sensuality are felt; and sometimes even when the mind is absorbed in prayer, or when they are receiving the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist. These movements, not being in their power, proceed from one of three sources.

3. They proceed occasionally—though but rarely, and in persons of delicate constitutions<sup>3</sup>—from sensible sweetness in measure and character. For then the spirit, that is, the higher part of our nature is moved to delight itself in God; and sensuality, which is the lower part, is moved towards sensible gratification, because it knows, and admits of, none other, and therefore is moved to what lies nearest to it, namely sensual pleasure.<sup>4</sup> And so it happens that the soul is in spirit praying, and on the other hand in the senses troubled, to its great disgust, with the rebellious movements and disturbances of the flesh passively;<sup>5</sup> this happens often at the moment of communion, because when the soul receives at the hands of our Lord the happy consummation of love which God intends to bestow, the sensual nature, as we have seen, takes its share in its own manner.<sup>6</sup> But inasmuch as these two parts form but one subject, man, they ordinarily share in their respective passions, each in its own way; for, as the philosopher tells us, all that is received is received according to the condition of the recipient.

4. Thus in these beginnings, and even when the soul has made some progress, the sensual part, being still imperfect, often receives the spirit of God with that very imperfection.<sup>7</sup> But when the sensual part is already renewed in the purgation of the dark night, it is no longer subject to these infirmities, because it receives so abundantly of the Spirit of God that it seems rather to be received into that Spirit itself, “as into that which is greater and grander.”<sup>8</sup> Thus it possesses everything according to the measure of the Spirit, “in an admirable manner, of Whom it is a partaker, united with God.”

5. The second source of these rebellious movements is Satan, who, in order to disquiet the soul during prayer, or when preparing for it, causes these filthy movements of our lower nature, and these, when in any degree admitted, are injury enough. Some persons not only relax in their prayers through fear of these movements, which is the object of Satan when he undertakes to assail them, but even abandon them altogether, for they imagine that they are more liable to these assaults during prayer than at other times. This is certainly true; for the devil then assails them more than at other times, that they may cease from prayer.

6. This is not all; for he represents before them then, most vividly, the most foul and filthy images, and occasionally in close relation with certain spiritual things and persons, by whom their souls are profited, that he may terrify and cow them.<sup>9</sup> Some are so grievously assailed that they dare not dwell upon anything, for it becomes at once a stumbling block to them, especially those who are of a melancholy temperament; these are so vehemently and effectually assailed as to be objects of the deepest pity; theirs, indeed, is a sad plight, for with some persons this trouble, when under the influence of melancholy, goes so far as to convince them that they hold communication with the evil spirit, which they are powerless to resist; some,



nevertheless, with a supreme effort, tear themselves away.<sup>10</sup> When melancholy is the occasion of these visitations of Satan, men in general cannot be delivered from them till their bodily health is improved, unless the dark night has overtaken the soul, gradually freeing it from all this trouble.

7. The third source of these depraved movements which war against the soul is usually the fear of them, for this fear which is brought about by a sudden remembrance of them, in a look, a word, or thought, makes souls suffer from them, but without fault on their part. Some souls, tender and fragile, never experience spiritual fervor or consolation in prayer without the spirit of luxury intruding at once and intoxicating their sensible nature until they are all but engulfed in and subjugated by this vice, the disturbance lasting, passively, as long as the fervor and sometimes succeeding in stirring the senses into rebellion. The reason is that these natures, as stated, are fragile and tender, and therefore susceptible to the slightest alteration of blood and humor whence these disturbances come, for exactly the same thing happens when they are roused to anger or upset by pain.<sup>11</sup>

8. Sometimes, spiritual persons, when either speaking of spiritual things, or doing good works, display a certain energy and strength arising out of their consideration for persons present, and that with a certain measure of vain joy. This also proceeds from spiritual luxury in the sense in which I use the word, and is accompanied usually<sup>12</sup> by a certain complacency of the will.

9. Some, too, from spiritual friendships with others, the source of which is luxury, and not spirituality. We may know it to be so by observing whether the remembrance of that affection increases our recollection and love of God, or brings remorse of conscience. When this affection is purely spiritual, the love of God grows with it, and the more we think of it the more we think of God, and the greater our longing for Him; for the one grows with the other. The spirit of God has this property, that it increases good by good, because there is a likeness and conformity between them. But when this affection springs out of the vice of sensuality, its effects are quite opposite; for the more it grows, the more is the love of God diminished, and the remembrance of Him also; for if this earthly love grows, that of God cools down; the remembrance of that love brings forgetfulness of God and a certain remorse of conscience.

10. On the other hand, if the love of God grows in the soul, the human love cools and is forgotten; for as they are contrary the one to the other, not only do they not help each other, but the one which predominates suppresses the other, and strengthens itself as philosophers say. And so our Savior tells us in the gospel, saying, “that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the spirit is spirit.”<sup>13</sup> that love which grows out of sensuality ends in the same, and that which is spiritual ends in the spirit of God, and makes it grow. This is the difference between these two loves, whereby we may know them. When the soul enters the dark night, these affections are ruled by reason; that night strengthens and purifies the affection which is according to God, and removes, destroys, or mortifies the other. In the beginning both are by it put out of sight, as I shall explain hereafter.<sup>14</sup>

*Of the Imperfections of Beginners In the Matter of Anger*

*1. Fourth imperfection: anger and peevishness—how caused. 2. Impatience with self or others contrary to humility. 3. Saints not made in a day.*

MANY beginners, because of their inordinate appetite for spiritual sweetness, generally fall into many imperfections in the matter of anger; for when spiritual things minister to them no more sweetness and delight, they naturally become peevish, and in that bitterness of spirit prove a burden to themselves in all they do; trifles make them angry, and they are at times intolerable to all about them. This happens generally after great sweetness in prayer; and so, when that sensible sweetness is past, their natural temper is soured and rendered morose. They are like a babe weaned from the breast, which he found so sweet. When this natural feeling of displeasure is not permitted to grow, there is no sin, but only imperfection, which will have to be purged away in the severity and aridities of the dark night.

2. There are other spiritual persons, too, among these who fall into another kind of spiritual anger. They are angry with other people for their faults, with a sort of unquiet zeal, and watch them; they are occasionally moved to blame them, and even do so in anger, constituting themselves guardians of virtue. All this is contrary to spiritual meekness.

3. Others, again, seeing their own imperfections, become angry with themselves with an impatience that is not humble. They are so impatient with their shortcomings as if they would be saints in one day. Many of these make many and grand resolutions, but, being self-confident and not humble, the more they resolve, the more they fall, and the more angry they become; not having the patience to wait for God's time; this is also opposed to spiritual meekness. There is no perfect remedy for this but in the dark night. There are, however, some people who are so patient, and who advance so slowly in their spiritual progress, that God wishes they were not so patient.

*Of the Imperfections in the Matter of Spiritual Gluttony*

*1. Fifth imperfection: spiritual gluttony. 2. Folly of exterior without interior mortification. Mortification of reason: obedience. 3. Obedience better than sacrifice. 4. Folly of self-direction. 5. Self-love in unadvised frequent communion. 6. Invisible grace better than sensible sweetness. 7. How some seek, not God, but themselves, even in prayer. 8. Continuation. 9. Desire for spiritual sweetness enfeebles the will. Spiritual sobriety.*

THERE is much to say of the fourth capital sin, which is spiritual gluttony, for there is scarcely one among beginners, however good his progress, who, in the matter of this sin, does not fall into some of the many imperfections to which beginners are liable, because of that sweetness which in the beginning they find in spiritual exercises.<sup>1</sup>

2. Many beginners, delighting in the sweetness and joy of their spiritual occupations, strive after spiritual sweetness rather than after purity and discretion,<sup>2</sup> which is that which God regards and accepts in the whole course of the spiritual way. For this reason, over and above their imperfection in seeking after sweetness in devotion, that spirit of gluttony, which has taken possession of them, forces them to overstep the limits of moderation, within which virtue is acquired and consists. For allured by the delights they then experience, some of them kill themselves by penances, and others weaken themselves by fasting. They take upon themselves more than they can bear, without rule or advice; they try to conceal their austerities from those whom they are bound to obey, and some even venture to practice them though commanded to abstain. These are full of imperfections—unreasonable people, who undervalue submission and obedience, which is the penance of the reason and judgment, and therefore a more acceptable and sweet sacrifice unto God than all the acts of bodily penance. Bodily penance which is nothing more than a suffering of the body and might as well be imposed on animals<sup>3</sup> is full of imperfections when the penance of the will is neglected, for men undertake it merely because they like it, and for the sweetness which they find in it.

3. Inasmuch then as all extremes are vicious, and as in this course of conduct men follow their own will, the consequences are that they grow in vice and not in virtue; at least they minister to their spiritual gluttony and pride, for they do not walk in the way of obedience. The devil so deceives many of them by exciting their gluttony through this sweetness which he increases, that, since they cannot obey, they either change, or vary, or add to, what is commanded them; so hard and bitter is obedience become.<sup>4</sup> The evil has so grown upon some, that they lose all desire to do their spiritual duties the instant obedience enjoins them; because all their satisfaction consists in doing that which pleases them, and perhaps it would be better for them to leave it undone.

4. Many of these importune their spiritual directors to allow them to do their own will: they extort that permission as if by force, and if it be refused, they mope like children, and become discontented, and think they are not serving God whenever they are thwarted. These persons clinging to sweetness and their own will, which they imagine is the will of God,<sup>5</sup> the moment they are contradicted, and directed according to the will of God, become fretful, fainthearted, and then fall away. They imagine that to please and satisfy themselves, is to serve and please God.

5. Others also there are, who, by reason of this spiritual gluttony, are so ignorant of their own meanness and misery, and so insensible to that loving fear and reverence due to the majesty of God, that they are not afraid to insist on being allowed by their confessors to confess and communicate frequently. And what is much worse, they very often dare to communicate without the leave and sanction of the minister and steward of Christ, purely out of their own head, and hide the truth from him. This eagerness for communion makes them confess carelessly, for they are more anxious to communicate anyhow than to communicate in pureness and perfection. It would be more profitable for them, and a holier course, to beg their confessors not to enjoin such frequent communions; though the better way between these two extremes is to be humble and resigned. This excessive boldness leads to great evil, and men may well be in fear of chastisement for such rashness.

6. These persons, when they communicate, strive with all their might for sensible sweetness, instead of worshipping in humility and praising God within themselves. So much are they given to this, that they think when they derive no sensible sweetness, they have done nothing, so meanly do they think of God; neither do they understand that the least of the blessings of

the Most Holy Sacrament is that which touches the senses, and that the invisible grace It confers is far greater; for God frequently withholds these sensible favors from men, that they may fix the eyes of faith upon Himself But these persons will feel and taste God, as if He were palpable and accessible to them, not only in communion but in all their other acts of devotion. All this is a very great imperfection, being against the purity of Faith,<sup>6</sup> and directly at variance with the nature of God.

7. They conduct themselves in the same way when they are praying; for they imagine that the whole business of prayer consists in sensible devotion, and this they strive to obtain with all their might, wearying their brains and perplexing all the faculties of their souls. When they miss that sensible devotion, they are cast down, thinking they have done nothing. This effort after sweetness destroys true devotion and spirituality, which consist in perseverance in prayer with patience and humility, mistrusting self, solely to please God. Therefore, when they once miss sweetness in prayer, or in any other act of religion, they feel a sort of repugnance to resume it, and sometimes cease from it altogether.

8. In this they are, as we said just now, like children who are not influenced by reason, but by their inclinations. They waste their time in the search after spiritual consolation, and are never satisfied with reading good books, taking up one meditation after another, in the pursuit of sensible sweetness in the things of God. God refuses it to them most justly, wisely, and lovingly, for if He did not, this spiritual gluttony on their part would grow into great evils. For this reason, it is most necessary that they should enter into the dark night, that they may be cleansed from this childishness.

9. They who are bent on sensible sweetness, labor also under another very great imperfection: excessive weakness and remissness on the rugged road of the cross; for the soul that is given to sweetness naturally sets its face against all the pain of self-denial. They labor under many other imperfections, which have their origin here, of which our Lord will heal them in due time, through temptations, aridities and trials, elements of the dark night. I will not enlarge upon them here, that I may avoid prolixity; but this will I say, that spiritual soberness and temperance produce a far different temper, that of mortification, of fear and submission in all things; showing us that the perfection and value of things consist not in the multitude thereof, but in our knowing how to deny ourselves in them. Spiritual men must labor after this with all their might, until it shall please God to purify them by leading them into the dark night. I hasten on with the description of these imperfections, that I may enter on the explanation of it.

*Of the Imperfections in the Matter Of Envy and Spiritual Sloth*

*1. Sixth and seventh imperfections: envy and spiritual sloth as against the holy envy of charity. 2. Cause and effects of spiritual sloth. 3. Perfection is to do the will of God. 4. Why prayer is sometimes irksome; true spiritual joys of the Cross. 5. Good fruits of the Dark Night; God alone can purify the soul.*

**B**EGINNERS are not free from many imperfections, in the matter of the two other vices, envy and spiritual sloth. Many of them are often vexed because of other men's goodness. They are sensibly afflicted when others outstrip them on the spiritual road, and will not endure to hear them praised. They become fretful over other men's virtues, and are sometimes unable to refrain from contradiction when they are commended; they depreciate them as much as they can, looking on them with an evil eye,<sup>1</sup> and feel it acutely because they themselves are not thought so well of, for they wish to be preferred above all others. This is most opposed to that charity of which St. Paul says, it "rejoiceth with the truth."<sup>2</sup> If charity admits of envy at all, it is a holy envy that makes us grieve that we have not the virtues that others have; but still rejoicing that they have them, and glad that others outstrip us in the race that they may serve God, we being so full of imperfection ourselves.

2. As to spiritual sloth, beginners are wont to find their most spiritual occupations irksome, and avoid them as repugnant to their taste, for being so given to sweetness in spiritual things they loathe them when they find none. If they miss once this sweetness in prayer which is their joy—it is expedient that God should deprive them of it in order to try them—they will not resume it; at other times they omit it, or return to it with a bad grace. Thus, under the influence of sloth they neglect the way of perfection—which is the denial of their will and pleasure for God—for the gratification of their own will, which they serve rather than the will of God.

3. Many of these will have it that God should will that which they will, and are afflicted when they must will that which He wills, reluctantly submitting their own to the divine will. The result is that they frequently imagine that what is not according to their will is also not according to the will of God; and, on the other hand, when they are pleased, they believe that God is pleased. They measure Him by themselves, and not themselves by Him, in direct contradiction to His teaching in the gospel; "He that shall lose his life for My sake, shall find it."<sup>3</sup> That is, he who shall give up his will for God shall have it, and he who will have it, he shall have it never.

4. They also find it wearisome to obey when they are commanded to do that which they like not; and because they walk in the way of consolation and spiritual sweetness, they are too weak for the rough trials of perfection. They are like persons delicately nurtured who avoid with heavy hearts all that is hard and rugged, and are offended at the Cross wherein the joys of the spirit consist. The more spiritual the work they have to do, the more irksome do they feel it to be. And because they insist on having their own way and will in spiritual things, they enter on the "strait way that leadeth unto life,"<sup>4</sup> of which Christ speaks, with repugnance and heaviness of heart.

5. Let this reference to these imperfections among the many under which they labor, who are in the first state of beginners, suffice to show them how necessary it is that God should bring them to the state of proficients, which He effects when He leads them into the dark night of which we shall now speak. In that night He weans them from the breasts of sweetness, in pure aridities and interior darkness, cleanses them from all these imperfections and childish ways, and by ways most different, makes them grow in virtue. For after all the exertions of beginners to mortify themselves in their actions and passions, their success will not be perfect, or even great, until God Himself shall do it for them in the purgation of the dark night. May God be pleased to give me His light, that I may speak profitably of this; for I have great need of it while treating of a night so dark and speaking of a subject so difficult.<sup>5</sup>

*Explanation of the First Line of the First Stanza. Beginning of the Explanation of the Dark Night*

*1. The two nights. 2. The first more common than the second, but both painful. 3. How and why God sends the night of the senses. 4. Continuation. 5. Time and conditions of entering this night.*

“**I**N A dark night.” This night—it is contemplation—produces in spiritual men two sorts of darkness or purgations conformable to the two divisions of man’s nature into sensual and spiritual. Thus the first night, or sensual purgation, wherein the soul is purified or detached, will be of the senses, subjecting them to the spirit. The other is that night or spiritual purgation wherein the soul is purified and detached in the spirit, and which subdues and disposes it for union with God in love. The night of sense is common, and the lot of many: these are the beginners, of whom I shall first speak. The spiritual night is the portion of very few; and they are those who have made some progress, exercised therein, of whom I shall speak hereafter.<sup>1</sup>

2. The first night, or purgation, is bitter and terrible to sense. The second is not to be compared with it, for it is much more awful to the spirit, as I shall soon show.<sup>2</sup> But as the night of sense is the first in order and the first to be entered, I shall speak of it briefly—for being of ordinary occurrence, it is the matter of many treatises—that I may pass on to treat more at large of spiritual night; for of that very little has been said, either by word of mouth or in writing, and little is known of it even by experience.

3. But the behavior of these beginners on the way of God is not noble, and very much according to their own liking and self-love, as I have said before.<sup>3</sup> Meanwhile, God seeks to raise them higher, to draw them out of this miserable manner of loving to a higher state of the love of God, to deliver them from the low usage of the senses and meditation whereby they seek after God, as I said before,<sup>4</sup> in ways so miserable and so unworthy of Him. He seeks to place them in the way of the spirit wherein they may the more abundantly, and more free from imperfections, commune with God now that they have been for some time tried in the way of goodness, persevering in meditation and prayer, and because of the sweetness they found therein have withdrawn their affections from the things of this world, and gained a certain spiritual strength in God, whereby they in some measure curb their love of the creature, and are able, for the love of God, to carry a slight burden of dryness, without going back to that more pleasant time when their spiritual exercises abounded in delights, and when the sun of the divine graces shone, as they think, more clearly upon them. God is now changing that light into darkness, and sealing up the door of the fountain of the sweet spiritual waters, which they tasted in God as often and as long as they wished. For when they were weak and tender, this door was then not shut, as it is written, “Behold, I have given before thee an opened door, which no man can shut; because thou hast a little strength, and hast kept My word, and hast not denied My name.”<sup>5</sup>

4. God thus leaves them in darkness so great that they know not whither to betake themselves with their imaginations and reflections of sense. They cannot advance a single step in meditation, as before, the inward sense now being overwhelmed in this night, and abandoned to dryness so great that they have no more any joy or sweetness in their spiritual exercises, as they had before; and in their place they find nothing but insipidity and bitterness. For, as I said before,<sup>6</sup> God now, looking upon them as somewhat grown in grace, weans them from the breasts that they may become strong, and cast their swaddling-clothes aside: He carries them in His arms no longer, and shows them how to walk alone. All this is strange to them, for all things seem to go against them.

5. Recollected persons enter the dark night sooner than others, after they have begun their spiritual course; because they are kept at a greater distance from the occasions of falling away, and because they correct more quickly their worldly desires, which is necessary in order to begin to enter the blessed night of sense. In general, there elapses no great length of time after they have begun before they enter the night of sense, and most of them do enter it, for they generally suffer aridities. The Holy Scriptures throughout, but especially the Psalms and the prophetic books, furnish many illustrations of the night of sense, for it is so common; but, to avoid prolixity, I omit them for the present, for those who do not see them there must content

themselves with the general experience.<sup>7</sup>



*Of the Signs by Which It May Be Known That the Spiritual Man Is Walking in the Way of This Night or Purgation of Sense*

*1. Three tests to distinguish the sensitive night from sin, tepidity, or bodily weakness. 2. First test: absence of delight in creatures. 3. Second test: longing anxiety for God. 4. Difference between aridity and lukewarmness. Melancholy and other physical causes. 5. Purgative aridity, how and why produced. 6. The sensitive appetite like the Israelites in the wilderness. 7. The will strengthened by sensible aridity. 8. Peace found in humble resignation. 9. Continuation. 10. Reason of it. 11. Third test: inability to meditate by imagination and discursive reflection. 12. Continuation. 13. Not all spiritual persons reach contemplation.*

**B**UT as these aridities frequently proceed, not from this night and purgation of the sensitive appetite, but from sins or imperfections, from weakness or lukewarmness, from some physical derangement or bodily indisposition, we shall here propose certain tests by which we may ascertain whether a particular aridity proceeds from the purgation of sense, or from any one of the vices I have just enumerated. There are three chief tests for this purpose:

2. The first is this: when we find no comfort in the things of God, and none also in created things. For when God brings the soul into the dark night in order to wean it from sweetness and to purge the desire of sense, He does not allow it to find sweetness or comfort anywhere. It is then probable, in such a case, that this dryness is not the result of sins or of imperfections recently committed; for if it were, we should feel some inclination or desire for other things than those of God. Whenever we give the reins to our desires in the way of any imperfection, our desires are instantly attracted to it, much or little, in proportion to the affection for it. But still, inasmuch as this absence of pleasure in the things of heaven and of earth may proceed from bodily indisposition or a melancholy temperament, which frequently cause dissatisfaction with all things, the second test and condition become necessary.

3. The second test and condition of this purgation are that the memory dwells ordinarily upon God with a painful anxiety and carefulness, the soul thinks it is not serving God, but going backwards, because it is no longer conscious of any sweetness in the things of God. In that case it is clear that this weariness of spirit and aridity are not the results of weakness and lukewarmness; for the peculiarity of lukewarmness is the want of earnestness in, and of interior solicitude for, the things of God.

4. There is, therefore, a great difference between dryness and lukewarmness, for the latter consists in great remissness and weakness of will and spirit, in the want of all solicitude about serving God. The true purgative aridity is accompanied in general by a painful anxiety, because the soul thinks that it is not serving God. Though this be occasionally increased by melancholy or other infirmity—so it sometimes happens yet it is not for that reason without its purgative effects on the desires, because the soul is deprived of all sweetness, and its sole anxieties are referred to God. For when mere bodily indisposition is the cause, all that it does is to produce disgust and the ruin of bodily health, without the desire of serving God which belongs to the purgative aridity. In this aridity, though the sensual part of man be greatly depressed, weak and sluggish in good works, by reason of the little satisfaction they furnish, the spirit is, nevertheless, ready and strong.

5. The cause of this dryness is that God is transferring to the spirit the goods and energies of the senses, which, having no natural fitness for them, become dry, parched up, and empty; for the sensual nature of man is helpless in those things which belong to the spirit simply. Thus the spirit having tasted, the flesh becomes weak and remiss; but the spirit, having received its proper nourishment, becomes strong, more vigilant and careful than before, lest there should be any negligence in serving God. At first it is not conscious of any spiritual sweetness and delight, but rather of aridities and distaste, because of the novelty of the change. The palate accustomed to sensible sweetness looks for it still. And because the spiritual palate is not prepared and purified for so delicious a taste until it shall have been for some time disposed for it in this arid and dark night, it cannot taste of the spiritual good, but rather of aridity and distaste, because it misses that which it enjoyed so easily before.

6. These, whom God begins to lead through the solitudes of the wilderness, are like the children of Israel, who, though God began to feed them, as soon as they were in the wilderness, with the manna of heaven, which was so sweet that as it is written, it turned to what every man liked,<sup>1</sup> were more sensible to the loss of the onions and flesh of Egypt—for they liked them



and had revelled in them—than to the delicious sweetness of the angelical food. So they wept and bewailed the flesh-pots of Egypt, saying, “We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt free-cost; the cucumbers come into our mind, and the melons, and the leeks, and the onions, and the garlic.”<sup>2</sup> Our appetite becomes so depraved that we long for miserable trifles, and loathe the priceless gifts of heaven.

7. But when these aridities arise in the purgative way of the sensual appetite, the spirit, though at first without any sweetness, for the reasons I have given, is conscious of strength and energy to act because of the substantial nature of its interior food, which is the commencement of contemplation, dim and dry to the senses. This contemplation is in general secret, and unknown to him who is admitted into it, and with the aridity and emptiness which it produces in the senses, it makes the soul long for solitude and quiet, without the power of reflecting on anything distinctly, or even desiring to do so.

8. Now, if they who are in this state knew how to be quiet, to disregard every interior and exterior work—“for the accomplishment of which they labor”—to be without solicitude about everything, “and resign themselves into the hands of God, with a loving interior obedience to His voice,”<sup>3</sup> they would have, in this tranquility, a most delicious sense of this interior food. This food is so delicate that, in general, it eludes our perceptions if we make any special effort to feel it, for, as I am saying, it does its work when the soul is most tranquil and free; it is like the air which vanishes when we shut our hands to grasp it.

9. The words of the Bridegroom which, addressed to the bride, in the Canticles, are applicable to this matter: “Turn away thine eyes from me, for they have made me flee away.”<sup>4</sup> For this is God’s way of bringing the soul into this state; the road by which He leads it is so different from the first, that if it will do anything in its own strength, it will hinder rather than aid His work. It was far otherwise once.

10. The reason is this: God is now working in the soul, in the state of contemplation, that is, when it advances from meditation to the state of proficients, in such a way as to seem to have bound up all the interior faculties, leaving no help in the understanding, no sweetness in the will, no reflections in the memory.<sup>5</sup> Therefore, at this time, all that the soul can do of itself ends, as I have said, in disturbing the peace and the work of God in the spirit amid the dryness of sense. This peace, being spiritual and delicate, effects a work that is quiet and delicate, unobtrusive and satisfactory,<sup>6</sup> pacific and utterly alien from the former delights, which were most gross and sensual. This is that peace, according to the Psalmist, which God speaks in the soul to make it spiritual. “He will speak peace unto His people.”<sup>7</sup> This brings us to the third test.

11. The third sign we have for ascertaining whether this dryness be the purgation of sense, is inability to meditate and make reflections, and to excite the imagination, as before, notwithstanding all the efforts we may make; for God begins now to communicate Himself, no longer through the channel of sense, as formerly, in consecutive reflections, by which we arranged and divided our knowledge, but in pure spirit, which admits not of successive reflections, and in the act of pure contemplation, to which neither the interior nor the exterior senses of our lower nature can ascend. Hence it is that the fancy and the imagination cannot help or suggest any reflections, nor use them ever afterwards.

12. It is understood here that this embarrassment and dissatisfaction of the senses do not arise out of any bodily ailment. When they arise from this, the indisposition, which is always changeable, having ceased, the powers of the soul recover their former energies, and find their previous satisfactions at once. It is otherwise in the purgation of the appetite, for as soon as we enter upon this, the inability to make our meditations continually grows. It is true that this purgation at first is not continuous in some persons, for they are not altogether without sensible sweetness and comfort—their weakness renders their rapid weaning inexpedient—nevertheless, it grows upon them more and more, and the operations of sense diminish; if they are going on to perfection. They, however, who are not walking in the way of contemplation, meet with a very different treatment, for the night of aridities is not continuous with them, they are sometimes in it, and sometimes not; they are at one time unable to meditate, and at another able as before.

13. God leads these persons into this night only to try them and to humble them, and to correct their desires, that they may not grow up spiritual gluttons, and not for the purpose of leading them into the way of the spirit, which is contemplation. God does not raise to perfect contemplation every one that is tried in the way of the spirit, nor even half of them,<sup>8</sup> and He alone knoweth why. Hence it is that these persons are never wholly weaned from the breasts of meditations and reflections, but only, as I have said, at intervals and at certain seasons.

*How They Are to Conduct Themselves Who Have Entered the Dark Night*

*1. Cause of the afflictions of the sensitive night. 2. Continuation. 3. Necessity of right instruction. 4. Confidence in God. 5. Conduct to be observed: patience and perseverance. The repose of love. 6. God will do His own work in the soul. 7. Continuation. 8. Meditation on the life and passion of Christ; contemplation an infusion of God.*

**D**URING the aridities, then, of the night of sense—when God effects the change of which I have spoken,<sup>1</sup> drawing the soul out of the way of sense into that of the spirit, from meditation to contemplation, where it is helpless in the things of God, so far as its own powers are concerned, as I have said<sup>2</sup>—spiritual persons have to endure great afflictions, not so much because of aridity, but because they are afraid that they will be lost on this road; thinking that they are spiritually ruined, and that God has forsaken them, because they find no help or consolation in holy things. Under these circumstances, they weary themselves, and strive, as they were wont, to fix the powers of the soul with some satisfaction upon some matter of meditation, imagining when they cannot do this, and are conscious of the effort, that they are doing nothing. This they do not without great dislike and inward unwillingness on the part of the soul, which enjoys its state of quietness and rest, the faculties not being at work.<sup>3</sup>

2. In thus turning away from this state they make no progress in the other, because, by exerting their own spirit, they lose that spirit which they had, that of tranquility and peace. They are like a man who does his work over again; or who goes out of a city that he may enter it once more; or who lets go what he has caught in hunting that he may hunt it again. Their labor is in vain; for they will find nothing, and that because they are turning back to their former ways, as I have said already.<sup>4</sup>

3. Under these circumstances, if they meet with no one who understands the matter, these persons fall away, and abandon the right road; or become weak, or at least put hindrances in the way of their further advancement, because of the great efforts they make to proceed in their former way of meditation, fatiguing their natural powers beyond measure. They think that their state is the result of negligence or of sin. All their own efforts are now in vain, because God is leading them by another and a very different road, that of contemplation. Their first road was that of discursive reflection, but the second knows no imagination or reasoning.

4. It behooves those who find themselves in this condition to take courage, and persevere in patience. Let them not afflict themselves, but put their confidence in God, who never forsakes those who seek Him with a pure and upright heart. Neither will He withhold from them all that is necessary for them on this road until He brings them to the clear and pure light of love, which He will show them in that other dark night of the spirit, if they shall merit an entrance into it.

5. The conduct to be observed in the night of sense is this: in nowise have recourse to meditations, for, as I have said, the time is now past, let the soul be quiet and at rest, though they may think they are doing nothing, that they are losing time, and that their lukewarmness is the reason of their unwillingness to employ their thoughts. They will do enough if they keep patience, and persevere in prayer; all they have to do is to keep their soul free, unembarrassed, and at rest from all thoughts and all knowledge, not anxious about their meditation, contenting themselves simply with directing their attention lovingly and calmly towards God; and all this without anxiety or effort, or desire to feel and taste His presence. For all such efforts disquiet the soul, and distract it from the calm repose and sweet tranquility of contemplation to which they are now admitted.

6. And though they may have many scruples that they are wasting time, and that it may be better for them to betake themselves to some other good work, seeing that in prayer and meditation they are become helpless; yet let them be patient with themselves, and remain quiet, for that which they are uneasy about is their own satisfaction and liberty of spirit. If they were now to exert their inferior faculties, they would simply hinder and ruin the good which, in that repose, God is working in the soul; for if a man while sitting for his portrait cannot be still, but moves about, the painter will never depict his face, and even the work already done will be spoiled.

7. In the same way when the soul interiorly rests, every action and passion, or consideration at that time, will distract

and disturb it, and make it feel the dryness and emptiness of sense. The more it strives to find help in affections and knowledge, the more will it feel the deficiency which cannot now be supplied in that way. It is therefore expedient for the soul which is in this condition not to be troubled because its faculties have become useless, yea, rather it should desire that they may become so quickly; for by not hindering the operation of infused contemplation, to which God is now admitting it, the soul is refreshed in peaceful abundance, and set on fire with the spirit of love, which this contemplation, dim and secret, induces and establishes within it.

8. “Still,<sup>5</sup> I do not mean to lay down a general rule for the cessation from meditation; that should occur when meditation is no longer feasible, and only then, when our Lord, either in the way of purgation and affliction, or of the most perfect contemplation, shall make it impossible. At other times, and on other occasions, this help must be had recourse to, namely, meditation on the life and passion of Christ, which is the best means of purification and of patience and of security on the road, and an admirable aid to the highest contemplation.” Contemplation is nothing else but a secret, peaceful, and loving infusion of God, which, if admitted, will set the soul on fire with the spirit of love, as I shall show in the explanation of the following verse.

*Stanza I*

*1. Second line of the first stanza. Earnest longing for God. 2. Martyrdom of divine love. 3. Love not felt at first, but after suffering. 4. Third line. 5. Fourth line: the escape from the sensitive appetite. 6. Continuation. 7. Happiness of leaving the creature for the Creator. 8. Continuation.*

*With Anxious Love Inflamed*

THE burning fire of love, in general, is not felt at first, for it has not begun to burn, either because of our natural impurity, or because the soul, not understanding its own state, has not given it, as I have said,<sup>1</sup> a peaceful rest within. Sometimes, however, whether it be so or not, a certain longing after God begins to be felt; and the more it grows, the more the soul feels itself touched and inflamed with the love of God, without knowing or understanding how or whence that love comes, except that at times this burning so inflames it that it longs earnestly after God. David in this night says of himself, “My heart is inflamed, and my reins are changed, and I am brought to nothing, and knew not.”<sup>2</sup> That is, “my heart hath been inflamed” in the love of contemplation; “my reins,” that is, my affections also, have been changed from the sensual to the spiritual way by this holy dryness, and in my denial of them, and “I am brought to nothing, and I knew not.” The soul, as I have just said, not knowing the way it goeth, sees itself brought to nothing as to all things of heaven and earth, wherein it delighted before, and on fire with love, not knowing how.

2. And because occasionally this fire of love grows in the spirit greatly, the longings of the soul for God are so deep that the very bones seem to dry up in that thirst, the bodily health to wither, the natural warmth and energies to perish in the intensity of that thirst of love. The soul feels it to be a living thirst. So was it with David when he said, “My soul hath thirsted after God, the living.”<sup>3</sup> It is as if he had said, the thirst of my soul is a living thirst. We may say of this thirst, that, being a living thirst, it kills. Though it should be noted that<sup>4</sup> this thirst is not continuously, but only occasionally, violent, nevertheless it is always felt in some degree.

3. I commenced by observing that this love, in general, is not felt at first, but only the dryness and emptiness of which I am speaking; and then, instead of love, which is afterwards enkindled, what the soul feels in the dryness and the emptiness of its faculties is a general painful anxiety about God, and a certain painful misgiving that it is not serving Him. But a soul anxious and afflicted for His sake is a sacrifice not a little pleasing unto God. Secret contemplation keeps the soul in this state of anxiety, until, in the course of time, having purged the sensual nature of man, in some degree, of its natural forces and affections by means of the aridities it occasions, it shall have kindled within it this divine love. But in the meantime, like a sick man in the hands of his physician, all it has to do, in the dark night and dry purgation of the desire, is to suffer, healing its many imperfections and practising many virtues, that it may become meet for the divine love, of which I shall speak while explaining the following line:

*O Happy Lot!*

4. When God establishes the soul in the dark night of sense, that He may purify, prepare, and subdue its lower nature, and unite it to the spirit, by depriving it of light, and causing it to cease from meditation—as He afterwards establishes it also in the spiritual night, that He may purify the spirit, and prepare it for union with Himself—the soul makes a gain so great, though it does not think so, that it looks upon it as great happiness to have escaped from the bondage of the senses of its lower

nature in that happy night, and therefore it sings—"O happy lot!"

5. It is necessary now for us to point out the benefits which accrue to the soul in this night, and for the sake of which it pronounces itself happy in having passed through it. All these benefits are comprised in these words:

*Forth Unobserved I Went*

6. This going forth of the soul is to be understood of that subjection to sense under which it labored when it was seeking after God in such weak, narrow, and fitful ways, as are the ways of man's lower nature.<sup>5</sup> It then fell at every step into a thousand imperfections and ignorances, as I showed while speaking of the seven capital sins, from all of which the spiritual man is delivered in the dark night which quenches all desire in all things whatsoever, and deprives him of all his lights in meditation, and brings with it other innumerable blessings in the acquirement of virtue, as I shall now show.

7. It will be a great joy and comfort to him who travels on this road, to observe how that which seemed so rugged and harsh, so contrary to spiritual sweetness, works in him so great a good. This good flows from going forth, as I am saying, as to all affections and operations of the soul, from all created things, in this night, and journeying towards those which are eternal, which is a great happiness and a great good. In the first place, because the desires are extinguished in all things; and in the second place, because they are few who persevere and enter in through the narrow gate, by the strait way that leadeth to life: "How narrow is the gate and strait is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it!"<sup>6</sup> are words of our Lord.

8. The narrow gate is this night of sense. The soul detaches itself from sense that it may enter on it, basing itself on faith,<sup>7</sup> which is a stranger to all sense, that it may afterwards travel along the strait road of the other night of the spirit, by which it advances towards God in most pure faith, which is the means of union with Him. This road, because so strait, dark, and terrible—for there is no comparison, as I shall show,<sup>8</sup> between its trials and darkness and those of the night of sense—is traveled by very few, but its blessings are so much the more. I shall begin now to say somewhat, with the utmost brevity, of the blessings of the night of sense, that I may pass on to the other.

*Of the Benefits Which the Night of Sense Brings to the Soul*

*1. Joy at the weaning of the soul from the goods of the sensitive appetite. 2. Benefits of the night of sense: infused contemplation. 3. Continuation. 4. Second benefit: knowledge of our own vileness. 5. Continuation. 6. Third benefit: reverence for God. Example of Moses. 7. Example of Job. 8. Spiritual illumination. 9. Isaiah. 10. David. 11. Continuation. 12. Humility. 13. Love of our neighbors. 14. Docility.*

**T**HIS night and purgation of the appetite is full of happiness to the soul, involving grand benefits, though, as I have said,<sup>1</sup> it seems to it as if all were lost. As Abraham made a great feast on the day of Isaac's weaning,<sup>2</sup> so there is joy in heaven when God takes a soul out of its swaddling clothes; when He takes His arms from under it, and makes it walk alone; when He denies it the sweet milk of the breast and the delicate food of children, and gives it bread with the crust to eat; when it begins to taste the bread of the strong, which, in the aridities and darkness of sense, is given to the spirit emptied and dried of all sensible sweetness; namely, the bread of infused contemplation, of which I have spoken.<sup>3</sup> This is the first and chief benefit which the soul gains here, and from which almost all the others flow.

2. Of these, the first is the knowledge of self and its own vileness. For over and above that those graces which God bestows on the soul are ordinarily included in this knowledge of self, these aridities and the emptiness of the faculties as to their former abounding, and the difficulty which good works present, bring the soul to a knowledge of its own vileness and misery, which in the season of prosperity it saw not. This truth is vividly shadowed forth in the book of Exodus. There we read that God, about to humble the children of Israel and bring them to a knowledge of themselves, commanded them to lay aside their ornaments and festival attire, which they ordinarily wore in the wilderness, saying,<sup>4</sup> "Now, lay aside thy ornaments"; that is, lay aside thy festival attire, and put on thy working dress, that thou mayest know what treatment thou hast deserved.

3. It is as if He says to the people: "Inasmuch as the ornaments you wear, being those of joy and festivity, are the cause why you think not meanly of yourselves—you really are mean—lay them aside; so that henceforth clad in vile garments, you may acknowledge that you deserve nothing better, and also who and what you are.

4. Hereby the soul learns the reality of its own misery, which before it knew not. For in the day of festivity when it found great sweetness, comfort, and help in God, it was highly satisfied and pleased, thinking that it rendered some service to God. For though it may not then explicitly say so, yet, on account of the satisfaction it finds, it is not wholly free from feeling it. But when it has put on the garments of heaviness; of aridity and abandonment, when its previous lights have become darkness, it possesses and retains more truly that excellent and necessary virtue of self-knowledge, counting itself for nothing, and having no satisfaction in itself, because it sees that of itself it does and can do nothing.

5. This diminished satisfaction with self, and the affliction it feels because it thinks that it is not serving God, God esteems more highly than all its former delights and all its good works, however great they may have been; for they were occasions of many imperfections and ignorances. But in this garb of aridity, not only these, of which I am speaking, but other benefits also of which I shall presently speak, and many more than I can speak of, flow as from their proper source and fount, that of self-knowledge.

6. In the first place, the soul learns to commune with God with more respect and reverence; always necessary in converse with the Most High. Now, in its prosperous days of sweetness and consolation, the soul was less observant of reverence, for the favors it then received rendered the desire somewhat bold with God, and less reverent than it should have been. Thus it was with Moses, when he heard the voice of God; for carried away by the delight he felt, he was venturing, without further consideration, to draw near, if God had not commanded him to stop, and put off his shoes, saying, "Come not nigh hither; put off the shoes from thy feet."<sup>5</sup> This teaches us how reverently and discreetly in spiritual detachment we are to converse with God. When Moses had become obedient to the voice, he remained so reverent and considerate, that not only did he not venture to draw near, but, in the words of Scripture, "durst not look at God."<sup>6</sup> For having put off the shoes of desire and



sweetness, he recognized profoundly his own wretchedness in the sight of God, for so it became him when about to listen to the words of God.

7. Again,<sup>7</sup> the condition to which God brought Job in order that he might converse with God, was not that of delight and bliss, of which he there speaks, and to which he had been accustomed. God left him in misery, naked on a dung-hill, abandoned and even persecuted by his friends, killed with bitterness and grief, covered with worms.<sup>8</sup> then it was that the Most High, Who lifeth up “the poor out of the dunghill,”<sup>9</sup> was pleased to descend and speak to Job face to face,<sup>10</sup> revealing to him “the deep mysteries of His wisdom,”<sup>11</sup> as He had never done before in the days of Job’s prosperity.

8. And now that I have to speak of it, I must here point out another great benefit of the dark night and aridity of the sensual appetite; the fulfillment of the words of the prophet, “Thy light shall rise up in darkness.”<sup>12</sup> God enlightens the soul, making it see not only its own misery and meanness, as I have said, but also His grandeur and majesty. When the desires are quelled, and sensible joy and consolation withdrawn, the understanding remains free and clear for the reception of the truth, for sensible joy and the desire even of spiritual things darken and perplex the mind, but the trials and aridities of sense also enlighten and quicken the understanding in the words of Isaiah,<sup>13</sup> “Vexation alone shall give understanding in the hearing.” Vexation shall make us understand how God in His divine wisdom proceeds to instruct a soul, emptied and cleansed—for such it must be before it can be the recipient of the divine inflowing—in a supernatural way, in the dark and arid night of contemplation, which He did not do, because it was given up to its former sweetness and joy.

9. The same prophet Isaiah sets this truth before us with great clearness, saying, “Whom shall he teach knowledge? And whom shall he make to understand the thing heard? Them that are weaned from the milk, that are plucked away from the breasts.”<sup>14</sup> The temper of mind, then, meet for the divine inflowing is not so much the milk of spiritual sweetness, nor the breasts of sweet reflections in the powers of sense, which the soul once had, as a failure of the first and withdrawal from the other. Therefore, if we would listen to the voice of God<sup>15</sup> with due reverence, the soul must stand upright, and not lean on the affections of sense for support. As the prophet Habakkuk says of himself, “I will stand upon my watch, and fix my step upon the munition, and I will behold to see what may be said to me.”<sup>16</sup> To stand upon the watch is to cast off all desires; to fix the step, is to cease from reflections of sense, that I may behold and understand what God will speak to me. Thus out of this night springs first the knowledge of one’s self, and on that, as on a foundation, is built up the knowledge of God. “Let me know myself,” says St. Augustine, “and I shall then know Thee, O my God,” for, as the philosophers say, one extreme is known by another.

10. In order to show more fully how effectual is the night of sense, in its aridity and desolation, to enlighten the soul more and more, I produce here the words of the Psalmist, which so clearly explain how greatly efficacious is this night in bringing forth the knowledge of God: “In a desert land, and inaccessible, and without water; so in the holy have I appeared to Thee, that I might see Thy strength and Thy glory.”<sup>17</sup> The Psalmist does not say here and it is worthy of observation—that his previous sweetness and delight were any dispositions or means whereby he might come to the knowledge of the glory of God, but rather that aridity and emptying of the powers of sense spoken of here as the barren and dry land.

11. Moreover, he does not say that his reflections and meditations on divine things, with which he was once familiar, had led him to the knowledge and contemplation of God’s power, but, rather, his inability to meditate on God, to form reflections by the help of his imagination; that is the inaccessible land. The means, therefore, of attaining to the knowledge of God, and of ourselves, is the dark night with all its aridities and emptiness; though not in the fullness and abundance of the other night of the spirit; for the knowledge that comes by this is, as it were, the beginning of the other.

12. Amid the aridities and emptiness of this night of the desires, the soul acquires also spiritual humility, which is the virtue opposed to the first capital sin, which, I said,<sup>18</sup> is spiritual pride. The humility acquired by self-knowledge purifies the soul from all the imperfections into which it fell in the day of its prosperity. For now, seeing itself so parched and miserable, it does not enter into its thoughts, even for a moment, to consider itself better than others, or that it has outstripped them on the spiritual road, as it did before; on the contrary, it acknowledges that others are better.

13. Out of this grows the love of our neighbor, for it now esteems them, and no longer judges them as it used to do, when it looked upon itself as exceedingly fervent, and upon others as not. Now it sees nothing but its own misery, which it keeps so constantly before its eyes that it can look upon nothing else. This state is admirably shown by David himself, when in this dark night, saying, “I was dumb, and was humbled, and kept silence from good things, and my sorrow was renewed.”<sup>19</sup> All the good of his soul seemed to him so mean that he could not speak of it; he was silent as to the good of others, because of the pain of the knowledge of his own wretchedness.

14. In this state, too, men are submissive and obedient in the spiritual way, for when they see their own wretchedness they not only listen to instruction, but desire to have it from anyone who will guide their steps and tell them what they ought to do. That selfish<sup>20</sup> presumption which sometimes possessed them in their prosperity is now gone; and, finally, all those imperfections are swept clean away to which I referred when I was treating of spiritual pride.

*Of Other Benefits Which the Night of Sense Brings to the Soul*

*1. Liberty of spirit. 2. Spiritual purity. 3. Spiritual sobriety. 4. Spiritual temperance. 5. Holy fear of God. 6. Patience, love, and peace. 7. Continuation. 8. Gentleness with God, self, and others. Holy emulation. 9. Fortitude amid aridities. 10. Other benefits. 11. Twelve fruits of the Holy Ghost. 12. Effects. 13. Anxious desire for the service of God. 14. Last benefit: deliverance from the world, the flesh, and the devil. 15. The "house being set in order."*

THE imperfections of spiritual avarice, under the influence of which the soul coveted this and that spiritual good, and was never satisfied with this or that practice of devotion, because of its eagerness for the sweetness it found therein, become now, in this arid and dark night, sufficiently corrected. For when the soul finds no sweetness and delight, as it was wont to do, in spiritual things, but rather bitterness and vexation, it has recourse to them with such moderation as to lose now, perhaps, through defect, what it lost before, through excess. Though, in general, to those who are brought to this night, God gives humility and readiness, but without sweetness, in order that they may obey Him solely through love. Thus they detach themselves from many things, because they find no sweetness in them.

2. The soul is purified, also, from those impurities of spiritual luxury of which I have spoken before,<sup>1</sup> in this aridity and bitterness of sense which it now finds in spiritual things; for those impurities are commonly said to proceed generally from the sweetness which flowed occasionally from the spirit into the sense.

3. The imperfections of the fourth sin, spiritual gluttony, from which the soul is delivered in the dark night, have been discussed in a former chapter,<sup>2</sup> though not all, because they cannot be numbered. Nor shall I speak of them here, for I wish to conclude the subject of this night, that I may pass on to the other, with regard to which I have serious things to write. Let it suffice for a knowledge of the innumerable advantages which the soul, in addition to those already mentioned, gains, in this night, wherewith to resist spiritual gluttony, to say that it is set free from the imperfections there enumerated, and from many other and greater evils than those described, into which many fall, as we learn by experience, because they have not corrected their desires in the matter of spiritual gluttony.

4. For when God has brought the soul into this arid and dark night, He so curbs desire and bridles concupiscence that it can scarcely feed at all upon the sensible sweetness of heavenly or of earthly things, and this so continuously that it corrects, reforms, and redresses its concupiscence and desires, so that the forces of its passions and concupiscence seem to be destroyed; for as the breast when not given to the babe dries up and withers, so the appetites when not fed upon waste away.<sup>3</sup> Marvelous benefits flow from that spiritual soberness, in addition to those I have mentioned; for because it mortifies concupiscence and desire, the soul dwells in spiritual tranquility and peace; for, where concupiscence and desire have no sway, there is no trouble, but, rather, the peace and consolation of God.

5. Another benefit comes from this; a constant remembrance of God, with the fear and dread that it is, as I have said,<sup>4</sup> going back on the spiritual way. This is a great benefit, and not one of the least, of aridity and purgation of the appetite, for the soul is purified and cleansed thereby, from those imperfections which clung to it because of the affections and desires, the effect of which is to darken and deaden the soul.

6. Another very great benefit to the soul in this night is, that it practices many virtues at once, as patience and longsuffering, which are well tried in these aridities, the soul persevering in its spiritual exercises without sweetness or comfort. The love of God is practiced, because it is no longer attracted by sweetness and consolation, but by God only. The virtue of fortitude also is practiced, because amid these difficulties, and the absence of sweetness in good works from which the soul now suffers, it gathers strength from weakness, and so becomes strong: finally, all the virtues, theological, cardinal, and moral, both in spiritual and corporal matters,<sup>5</sup> are practiced amidst these aridities.

7. In this night the soul obtains these four benefits here mentioned, namely, delight of peace, constant remembrance of God, purity and cleanness of soul, the practice of all the virtues of which I have just spoken. So David speaks from his own experience when he was in this night. "My soul," he says, "refuses to be comforted; I was mindful of God and was delighted,



and was exercised, and my spirit fainted.” He adds forthwith: “I meditated in the night with my own heart, and I was exercised, and I swept my spirit”<sup>6</sup> clean of all affections.

8. The soul is purified also in this aridity of the desires from the imperfections of the other three capital sins of which I have spoken,<sup>7</sup> envy, anger, and sloth, and acquires the opposite virtues. Softened and humbled by these aridities, by the hardships, temptations, and afflictions which in this night try it, it becomes gentle with God, with itself, and with its neighbor. It is no longer impatiently angry with itself because of its own faults, nor with its neighbor because of his; neither is it discontented or given to unseemly complaints against God because He does not sanctify it at once. As to envy, the soul is in charity with every one, and if any envy remain, it is no longer vicious as before, when the soul was afflicted when it saw others preferred to it, and raised higher; for now it yields to every one considering its own misery, and the envy it feels, if it feels any, is a virtuous envy, a desire to emulate them, which is great virtue.

9. The sloth and weariness now felt in spiritual things are no longer vicious as they were once. They were once the fruit of spiritual delights which the soul experienced at times, and sought after when it had them not. But this present weariness proceeds not from the failure of sweetness, for God has taken it all away in this purgation of the desire.

10. Other innumerable benefits beside these flow from this arid contemplation; for, in the midst of these aridities and hardship, God communicates to the soul, when it least expects it, spiritual sweetness, most pure love, and spiritual knowledge of the most exalted kind, of greater worth and profit than any of which it had previous experience, though at first the soul may not think so, for the spiritual influence now communicated is most delicate, and imperceptible by sense.

11. Finally, as the soul is purified from all sensual affections and desires, it attains to liberty of spirit, wherein the twelve fruits of the Holy Ghost are had. It is also delivered in a most wonderful way from the hands of its three enemies—the devil, the world, and the flesh; for when all the delight and sweetness of sense are quenched, the devil, the world, and the flesh have no weapons and no strength wherewith to assail it.

12. These aridities, then, make the soul love God in all pureness, for now it is influenced not by the pleasure and sweetness which it found in its works—as perhaps it was when that sweetness was present—but by the sole desire to please God. It is not presumptuous and self-satisfied, as perhaps it may have been in the day of its prosperity, but timid and diffident, without any self-satisfaction. Herein consists that holy fear by which virtues are preserved and grow. This aridity quenches concupiscence, and our natural spirits, as I said before,<sup>8</sup> for now, when God infuses, from time to time, His own sweetness into the soul, it would be strange if it found by any efforts of its own, as has been already said,<sup>9</sup> any comfort or sweetness in any spiritual act or practice.

13. The fear of God and the desire to please Him increase in this arid night; for as the breasts of sensuality, which nourished and sustained the desires which the soul followed after, become dry, nothing remains in that aridity and detachment but an anxious desire to serve God, which is most pleasing unto Him, as it is written: “a sacrifice to God is an afflicted spirit.”<sup>10</sup>

14. When the soul beholds the many and great benefits which have fallen to its lot in this arid purgation through which it passed, it cries out with truth, “Oh, happy lot, forth unobserved I went.” I escaped from the bondage and thralldom of my sensual desires and affections, unobserved, so that none of my three enemies were able to hinder me. These enemies of the soul already spoken of<sup>11</sup> so bind and imprison it in sensual desires and affections that it cannot go forth out of itself to the liberty of the perfect love of God; without them they cannot attack it.

15. Hence, when by continual mortification the four passions of the soul are calmed, that is, joy, grief, hope, and fear, when the natural desires are lulled to sleep in our sensual nature by persistent aridities, when the senses and the interior powers of the soul cease to be active, and meditation no longer pursued, as has been already said,<sup>12</sup> which is the household of the lower part of the soul, then the liberty of the spirit is unassailable by these enemies and the house remains calm and tranquil as the words that follow show.

*The Last Line of the First Stanza Explained*

*1. The "house at rest." 2. Trials of the night of sense: the sting of the flesh. 3. The spirit of blasphemy. 4. The spirit of giddiness. 5. The soul purified for the divine union by suffering. 6. Duration and intensity of trials determined by God. 7. And proportioned to the strength of the soul. 8. "To suffer and to be despised."*

“MY HOUSE being now at rest.” When the house of sensuality was at rest, that is, when the passions were mortified, concupiscence quenched, the desires subdued and lulled to sleep in the blessed night of the purgation of sense, the soul began to set out on the way of the spirit, the way of beginners and proficients,<sup>1</sup> which is also called the illuminative way, or the way of infused contemplation, wherein God Himself teaches and refreshes the soul without meditation or any active efforts that itself may deliberately make. Such, as I have said, is this night and purgation of the senses.<sup>2</sup>

2. But this night, in their case who are to enter into that other more awful night of the spirit, that they may go forward to the divine union of the love of God—it is not every one, but only a few who do so in general—is attended with heavy trials and temptations of sense of long continuance, in some longer than in others; for to some is sent the angel of Satan, the spirit of impurity, to buffet them with horrible and violent temptations of the flesh, to trouble their minds with filthy thoughts, and their imaginations with representations of sin most vividly depicted; which, at times, becomes an affliction more grievous than death.

3. At other times this night is attended by the spirit of blasphemy; the thoughts and conceptions are overrun with intolerable blasphemies, which now and then are suggested to the imagination with such violence as almost to break forth in words; this, too, is a heavy affliction.

4. Again, another hateful spirit, called by the prophet “the spirit of giddiness,”<sup>3</sup> is suffered to torment them, not that they may fall but as a trial.<sup>4</sup> This spirit so clouds their judgment that they are filled with a thousand scruples and perplexities so embarrassing that they can never satisfy themselves about them, nor submit their judgment therein to the counsel and direction of others. This is one of the most grievous stings and horrors of this night, approaching very nearly to that which takes place in the night of the spirit.

5. God ordinarily sends these violent storms and temptations in the night of the purgation of the sense to those whom he is about to lead afterwards into the other night—though all do not enter in—that being thus chastened and buffeted they may prove themselves, dispose and inure sense and faculties for the union of the divine wisdom to which they are to be then admitted. For if the soul be not tempted, tried, and proved in temptations and afflictions, sense will never attain to wisdom. That is why it is said in Ecclesiastes,<sup>5</sup> “What doth he know,” asks the wise man, “that hath not been tried? . . . he that hath no experience knoweth little . . . he that hath not been tried, what manner of things doth he know?” Jeremiah also bears witness to the same truth, saying: “Thou hast chastised me, and I was instructed.”<sup>6</sup> The most proper form of this chastening, for him who will apply himself unto wisdom, are those interior trials of which I am now speaking. They are that which most effectually purges sense of all sweetness and consolations, to which, by reason of our natural weakness, we are addicted, and by them the soul is really humbled that it may be prepared for its coming exaltation.

6. But how long the soul will continue in this fast and penance of sense, cannot with certainty be told, because it is not the same in all, neither are all subjected to the same temptations. These trials are measured by the divine will, and are proportioned to the imperfections, many or few, to be purged away: and also to the degree of union in love to which God intends to raise the soul: that is the measure of its humiliations, both in their intensity and duration.

7. Those who are strong and more able to bear suffering, are purified in more intense trials, and in less time. But those who are weak are purified very slowly, with weak temptations, and the night of their purgation is long: their senses are refreshed from time to time lest they should fall away; these, however, come late to the pureness of their perfection in this life,

and some of them never. These persons are not clearly in the purgative night, nor clearly out of it; for though they make no progress, yet in order that they may be humble and know themselves, God tries them for a season in aridities and temptations, and visits them with His consolations at intervals lest they should become fainthearted, and seek for comfort in the ways of the world.

8. From other souls, still weaker, God, as it were, hides Himself, that He may try them in His love, for without this hiding of His face from them they would never learn how to approach Him. But those souls that are to enter so blessed and high a state as this of the union of love, however quickly God may lead them, tarry long, in general, amidst aridities and temptations,<sup>7</sup> as we see by experience. But it is now time to begin the explanation of the second night.

# BOOK TWO

*Of the Night of the Spirit*

*The Second Night; That of the Spirit. When It Begins*

*1. Description of a soul which has passed through the sensitive night. 2. Continuation. 3. Continuation. 4. Cause of ecstasies.*

THE soul, which God is leading onwards, enters not into the night of the spirit<sup>1</sup> at once when it has passed through the aridities and trials of the first purgation and night of sense; yea, rather it must spend some time, perhaps years, after quitting the state of beginners, in exercising itself in the state of proficients. In this state—as one released from a rigorous imprisonment—it occupies itself in divine things with much greater freedom and satisfaction, and its joy is more abundant and interior than it was in the beginning before it entered the night of sense; its imagination and faculties are not held, as hitherto, in the bonds of meditation and spiritual reflections; it now rises at once to most tranquil and loving contemplation, and finds spiritual sweetness without the fatigue of meditation.

2. However, as the purgation of the soul is still somewhat incomplete—the chief part, the purgation of the spirit, being wanting, without which, by reason of the union of our higher and lower nature, man being an individual, the purgation of sense, however violent it may have been, is not finished and perfect—the soul will never be free from some trouble,<sup>2</sup> aridities, darkness, and trials, sometimes much more severe than in the past, which are, as it were, signs and heralds of the coming night of the spirit, though not so lasting as that expected night; for when the days or the season of this tempestuous night have passed, the soul recovers at once its wonted serenity. It is in this way that God purifies some souls who are not to rise to so high a degree of love as others. He admits them at intervals into the night of contemplation or spiritual purgation, causing the sun to shine upon them, and then to hide its face, according to the words of the Psalmist: “He sendeth His crystal,” that is contemplation, “like morsels.”<sup>3</sup> These morsels of dim contemplation are, however, never so intense as is that awful night of contemplation of which I am speaking, and in which God purposely places the soul, that He may raise it to the divine union.

3. That sweetness and interior delight, which proficients find so easily and so plentifully, come now in greater abundance than before, overflowing into the senses more than they were wont to do previous to the purgation of sense. The senses now being more pure, can taste of the sweetness of the spirit in their way with greater ease. But as the sensual part of the soul is weak, without any capacity for the strong things of the spirit, they who are in the state of proficients by reason of the spiritual communications made to the sensual part, are subject therein to great infirmities and sufferings, and physical derangements, and consequently weariness of mind,<sup>4</sup> as it is written: “the corruptible body . . . presseth down the mind.”<sup>5</sup> Hence the communications made to these cannot be very strong, intense, or spiritual, such as they are required to be for the divine union with God, because of the weakness and corruption of the sensual part which has a share in them.

4. Here is the source of ecstasies, raptures, and dislocation of the bones which always happen whenever these communications are not purely spiritual; that is, granted to the mind alone, as in the case of the perfect, already purified in the second night of the spirit. In these, raptures and physical sufferings have no place, for they enjoy liberty of spirit with unclouded and unsuspended senses. To make it clear how necessary it is for proficients to enter into the night of the spirit, I will now proceed to point out certain imperfections and dangers which beset them.

*Of Certain Imperfections of Proficients*

*1. Habitual imperfections of proficients; roots of sin. 2. Dullness of mind. 3. Actual imperfections of proficients: self-deception. 4. Pride and presumption. 5. Necessity of spiritual night for perfection. 6. Continuation.*

**P**ROFICIENTS labor under two kinds of imperfections; one habitual, the other actual. The habitual imperfections are their affections and imperfect habits which still remain, like roots, in the mind, where the purgation of sense could not penetrate. The difference between the purgation of these and of the others is like the difference between plucking out a root and tearing off a branch; or removing a fresh and an old stain. For, as I have said,<sup>1</sup> the purgation of sense is, for the spirit, merely the gate and entrance of contemplation, and serves rather to bend sense to the spirit than to unite the latter with God. The stains of the old man still remain in the spirit, though not visible to it, and if they be not removed by the strong soap and lye of the purgation of this night, the spirit cannot attain to the pureness of the divine union.

2. They suffer also from dullness of mind, and natural rudeness which every man contracts by sin; from distraction and dissipation of mind, which must be refined, enlightened, and made recollected in the sufferings and hardships of this night. All those who have not advanced beyond the state of proficients are subject to these habitual imperfections, which cannot co-exist, as I said before,<sup>2</sup> with the perfect state of union with God in love.

3. But all are not subject to actual imperfections in the same way; some, whose spiritual good is so much on the surface, and so much under the influence of sense, fall into greater<sup>3</sup> unseemlinesses and dangers, of which I spoke in the beginning of this book. For as their mind and sense and feelings are full of fancies whereby they very often see imaginary and spiritual visions—all this, together with other pleasurable impressions, befall many of them in this state, wherein the devil and their own proper fancy most frequently delude the soul—and as Satan is wont with so much sweetness to insinuate, and impress these imaginations, they are easily deluded and influenced by him, because they do not take the precaution to resign themselves into the hands of God, and defend themselves vigorously by faith<sup>4</sup> against these visions and impressions. For now the devil causes many<sup>5</sup> both to believe in vain visions and false prophecies, and to presume that God and His saints are speaking to them: they also frequently believe in their own fancies.

4. Now, too, Satan is wont to fill them with pride and presumption; and they, led on by vanity and arrogance, make a show of themselves in the performance of exterior acts which have an air of sanctity, such as ecstasies and other appearances. They thus become bold with God, losing holy fear, which is the key and guard of all virtue. Some of them become so entangled in manifold falsehoods and delusions, and so persist in them, that their return to the pure road of virtue and real spirituality is exceedingly doubtful. They fall into this miserable condition because they gave way to these spiritual imaginations and feelings with overmuch confidence when they began to advance on the road of spirituality.

5. I have much to say of these imperfections of theirs, and how much more incurable these are than the others, because they consider them as more spiritual than those; but I shall pass on. One thing, however, I must say, to establish the necessity of the spiritual night which is the purgation of the soul that is to go on to perfection, that there is not one among the proficient, however great may be his exertions, who can be free from many of these natural affections and imperfect habits, the purification of which must, as I have said, necessarily precede the divine union.

6. Besides, and I have said it before,<sup>6</sup> because the spiritual communications reach also to the lower part of the soul, they cannot be as intense, pure, and strong, as the divine union demands, and, therefore, if that is to be attained, the soul must enter the second night of the spirit where—perfectly detaching sense and spirit from all sweetness and from all imaginations—it will travel on the road of faith dark and pure, the proper and adequate means of union, as it is written: “I will espouse thee to Me in faith,”<sup>7</sup> that is, I will unite Myself to thee in faith.

*Notes on That Which Is to Follow*

*1. True spiritual sweetness harmonizes sense with spirit and gives courage to the will. 2. The sensitive night a re-formation of the appetite; the spiritual night a purgation of sense and spirit together. 3. Necessity of courage. 4. Means of the final purification of the soul. 5. Continuation.*

PROFICIENTS, then, experienced during the past time these sweet communications, in order that the sensual part of the soul,<sup>1</sup> allured and attracted by the spiritual sweetness overflowing from the spirit, may be united and made one with the spiritual part; both parts eating the same spiritual food, each in its own way, off the same dish of their one being, that, thus in a certain way become one and concordant, they might be prepared for the sufferings of the sharp and rough purgation of the spirit which is before them. In that purgation the two parts of the soul, the spiritual and the sensual, are to be wholly purified, for neither of them can be perfectly purified without the other, and the purgation of sense is then effectual when that of the spirit commences in earnest.

2. Hence it is that the night of sense may and should be called a certain re-formation and bridling of desire, rather than purgation, because all the imperfections and disorders of the sensual part having their strength and roots in the mind, the seat of good and evil habits,<sup>2</sup> can never be wholly purged away until the latter, with the rebelliousness and perverseness of the mind, are corrected. Therefore, in this night ensuing, both parts of the soul are purified together: this is the end for which it was necessary to have passed through the re-formation of the first night, and to have attained to that tranquility which is its fruit, in order that sense and spirit, made one, may both be purified and suffer together with the greater courage, most necessary for so violent and sharp a purgation. For if the weakness of the lower part be not redressed, and if it have acquired no courage in God, in the sweet communions with Him subsequently enjoyed, nature would have been unprepared and without strength for the trials of this night.

3. The intercourse of proficients with God is, however, still most mean, because the gold of the spirit is not purified and refined. They think, therefore, and speak of Him as children, and their feelings are those of children, as described by the Apostle: “When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child”;<sup>3</sup> because they have not reached perfection, which is union with God in love. But in the state of union, having grown to manhood, they do great things in spirit—all their actions and all their faculties being now rather divine than human, as I shall hereafter explain<sup>4</sup>—for God is stripping them of the old man, and clothing them with the new, as it is written: “Put on the new man, who is created according to God”;<sup>5</sup> and again, “Be reformed in the newness of your mind.”<sup>6</sup>

4. He now denudes the faculties, the affections, and feelings, spiritual and sensual, interior and exterior, leaving the understanding in darkness, the will dry, the memory empty, the affections of the soul in the deepest affliction, bitterness, and distress; withholding from it the former sweetness it had in spiritual things, in order that this privation may be one of the principles, of which the mind has need, that the spiritual form of the spirit, which is the union of love, may enter into it and be one with it.

5. All this our Lord effects in the soul by means of contemplation, pure and dark, as it is described by it in the first stanza. This stanza, though explained in reference to<sup>7</sup> the night of sense, the soul understands it principally of this second night of the spirit, because that is the chief part of the purification of the soul. I shall, therefore, apply it in this sense, and explain it here again.

*Explanation of the First Stanza*

1. Paraphrase of the first stanza according to the second night. 2. Transformation of the memory, intellect, and will. 3. Continuation.

*In a dark night,  
With anxious love inflamed,  
O, happy lot!  
Forth unobserved I went,  
My house being now at rest.*

TA KING these words, then, with reference to purgation, contemplation, or detachment, or poverty of spirit—these are, as it were, one and the same thing—they may be thus explained in this way, as if the soul were saying: In poverty, without protection and help<sup>1</sup> in all my powers, the understanding in darkness, the will under constraint, the memory in trouble and distress, in the dark, in pure faith, which is the dark night of the natural faculties, the will alone touched by grief and affliction, and the anxieties of the love of God, I went forth out of myself, out of my low conceptions and lukewarm love, out of my scanty and poor sense of God, without being hindered by the flesh or the devil.

2. This was to me a great blessing, a happy lot, for by annihilating and subduing my faculties, passions, appetites,<sup>2</sup> and affections—the instruments of my low conceptions of God—I went forth out of the scanty works and ways of my own to those of God; that is, my understanding went forth out of itself, and from human and natural<sup>3</sup> became divine; for united to God in that purgation, it understands no more by its natural powers,<sup>4</sup> but in the divine wisdom to which it is united.

3. My will went forth out of itself becoming divine, for now, united with the divine love, it loves no more meanly with the powers of its nature,<sup>5</sup> but with the energy and pureness of the divine spirit. Thus the will acts now in the things of God, not in a human way, and the memory also is transformed in eternal apprehensions of glory. Finally, all the energies and affections of the soul are, in this night and purgation of the old man, renewed into a divine temper and delight.



*Explains How This Dim Contemplation Is Not a Night Only, But Pain and Torment Also for the Soul*

*1. Definition of the night of the spirit. The will passive save to consent and attend. 2. Why the divine illumination is called night. 3. It is dark to imperfect faculties from excess of light. 4. Dionysius the Areopagite. 5. It is painful from the meeting of contraries. 6. First pain: darkness of self revealed in the light of God. 7. Fear of unworthiness. 8. Second pain: weakness of self felt under the strength of God. 9. To the weak soul the gentle hand of God feels heavy.*

*In a Dark Night*

THE dark night is a certain inflowing of God into the soul which cleanses it of its ignorances and imperfections, habitual, natural, and spiritual. Contemplatives call it infused contemplation, or mystical theology,<sup>1</sup> whereby God secretly teaches the soul and instructs it in the perfection of love, without efforts on its own part [beyond a loving attention to God, listening to His voice and admitting the light He sends, but without understanding how this is infused contemplation.]<sup>2</sup> And inasmuch as it is the loving wisdom of God, it produces special effects in the soul, for it prepares it, by purifying and enlightening it, for union with God in love: it is the same loving wisdom, which by enlightening purifies the blessed spirits, that here purifies and enlightens the soul.

2. But it may be asked: Why does the soul call the divine light, which enlightens the soul and purges it of its ignorances, the dark night? I reply, that the divine wisdom is, for two reasons, not night and darkness only, but pain and torment also to the soul. The first is, the divine wisdom is so high that it transcends the capacity of the soul, and therefore is, in that respect, darkness. The second reason is based on the meanness and impurity of the soul, and in that respect the divine wisdom is painful to it, afflictive and dark also.

3. To prove the truth of the first reason, we take for granted a principle of the philosopher, namely, the more clear and evident divine things are, the more dark and hidden they are to the soul naturally. Thus the more clear the light the more does it blind the eyes of the owl,<sup>3</sup> and the stronger the sun's rays the more it blinds the visual organs; overcoming them, by reason of their weakness, and depriving them of the power of seeing. So the divine light of contemplation, when it beats on the soul, not yet perfectly enlightened, causes spiritual darkness, because it not only surpasses its strength, but because it blinds it and deprives it of its natural perceptions.

4. It is for this reason that St. Dionysius and other mystic theologians call infused contemplation a ray of darkness,<sup>4</sup> that is, for the unenlightened and unpurified soul, because this great supernatural light masters the natural power of the reason and takes away its natural way of understanding. Therefore, David also says: "Cloud and darkness are round about Him";<sup>5</sup> not that this is so in reality, but in reference to our weak understanding, which, in light so great, becomes dimmed and blind, unable to ascend so high. He repeats it, saying: "At the brightness that was before Him the clouds passed,"<sup>6</sup> that is, between Him and our understanding. This is the reason why the illuminating ray of hidden wisdom, when God sends it from Himself into the soul not yet transformed, produces thick darkness in the understanding.

5. This dim contemplation is in its beginnings painful also to the soul. For as the infused divine contemplation contains many excellences in the highest degree, and the soul, which is the recipient, because not yet pure, is involved in many miseries—in the highest degree, too<sup>7</sup>—the result is—as two contraries cannot co-exist in the same subject—that the soul must suffer and be in pain, being the subject in which the two contraries meet, and resist each other because of the purgation of the soul from its imperfections, which is being wrought by contemplation. I shall show it to be so by the following induction.

6. In the first place, because the light and wisdom of contemplation is most pure and bright, and because the soul, on which it beats, is in darkness and impure, that soul which is the recipient must greatly suffer. As eyes weakened and clouded by humors suffer pain when the clear light beats upon them, so the soul, by reason of its impurity, suffers exceedingly when the

divine light really shines upon it. And when the rays of this pure light strike upon the soul, in order to expel its impurities, the soul perceives itself to be so unclean and miserable that it seems as if God had set Himself against it, and itself were set against God. So grievous and painful is this feeling—for it thinks now that God has abandoned it—that it was one of the heaviest afflictions of Job during his trial. “Why hast Thou set me contrary to Thee, and I become burdensome to myself?”<sup>8</sup> The soul seeing distinctly in this bright and pure light, though dimly, its own impurity, acknowledges its own unworthiness before God and all creatures.

7. That which pains it still more is the fear it has that it never will be worthy, and that all its goodness is gone. This is the fruit of that deep impression, made on the mind, in the knowledge and sense of its own wickedness and misery. For now the divine and dim light reveals to it all its wretchedness, and it sees clearly that of itself it can never be other than it is. In this sense we can understand the words of the Psalmist: “For iniquities Thou hast chastised man, and Thou hast made his soul pine away and wither<sup>9</sup> as a spider.”<sup>10</sup>

8. In the second place, the pain of the soul comes from its natural,<sup>11</sup> moral, and spiritual weakness; for when this divine contemplation strikes it with a certain vehemence, in order to strengthen it and subdue it, it is then so pained in its weakness as almost to faint away, particularly at times when the divine contemplation strikes it with greater vehemence; for sense and spirit, as if under a heavy and gloomy burden, suffer and groan in agony so great that death itself would be a desired relief.

9. This was the experience of Job, and he says, “I will not that He contend with me with much strength, nor that He oppress me with the weight of His greatness.”<sup>12</sup> The soul under the burden of this oppression feels itself so removed out of God’s favor that it thinks—and so it is—that all things which consoled it formerly have utterly failed it, and that no one is left to pity it. Job also speaks to the same purport, “Have mercy upon me, have mercy upon me, at the least you my friends, because the hand of our Lord hath touched me.”<sup>13</sup> Wonderful and piteous sight! So great are the weakness and impurity of the soul that the hand of God, so soft and so gentle, is felt to be so heavy and oppressive,<sup>14</sup> though neither pressing nor resting on it, but merely touching it, and that, too, most mercifully; for He touches the soul not to chastise it, but to load it with His graces.

### *Of Other Sufferings of the Soul in This Night*

*1. Third pain: loss of God felt in conscious unworthiness. 2. The soul feels abandoned by God and man. 3. Continuation. 4. Jonah. 5. Fourth pain: emptiness of self felt in the fullness of God. 6. Continuation. 7. Spiritual suffocation. 8. Illustrations from Holy Scripture. 9. Continuation. 10. Purgatory in this life.*

THE third kind of suffering and pain for the soul comes from the meeting of two extremes, the human and the divine:<sup>1</sup> the latter is the purgative contemplation; the human is the soul itself. The divine touches the soul to renew it and to ripen it, in order to make it divine, to detach it from the habitual affections and qualities of the old man, to which it clings and conforms itself. The divine extreme so breaks and bruises the spiritual substance,<sup>2</sup> swallowing it up in profound darkness, that the soul, at the sight of its own wretchedness, seems to perish and waste away, by a cruel spiritual death, as if it were swallowed up and devoured by a wild beast, suffering the pangs of Jonah in the belly of the whale. For it must lie buried in the grave of a gloomy death that it may attain to the spiritual resurrection for which it hopes. David describes this kind of pain and suffering—though it really baffles description—when he says, “The sorrows of death have compassed me . . . the sorrows of hell have compassed me. . . . In my tribulation I have called upon our Lord, and have cried to my God.”<sup>3</sup>

2. But the greatest affliction of the sorrowful soul in this state is the thought that God has abandoned it, of which it has no doubt; that He has cast it away into darkness as an abominable thing. The thought that He has abandoned it is a grievous and pitiable affliction. David experienced the same trials when he said, “As the wounded sleeping in the sepulchers, of whom Thou art mindful no more; and they are cast off from Thy hand. They have put me in the lower lake, in the dark places, and in the shadow of death. Thy fury is confirmed upon me; and all Thy waves Thou hast brought in upon me.”<sup>4</sup>

3. For, in truth, when the soul is in the pangs of the purgative contemplation, the shadow of death and the pains and torments of hell are most acutely felt, that is, the sense of being without God, being chastised and abandoned in His wrath and heavy displeasure. All this and even more the soul feels now, for a fearful apprehension has come upon it that thus it will be with it for ever. It has also the same sense of abandonment with respect to all creatures, and that it is an object of contempt to all, especially to its friends; and so the Psalmist continues, saying, “Thou hast put away my acquaintances far from me; they have set me an abomination to themselves.”<sup>5</sup>

4. The prophet Jonah also, as one who had experience of this, both bodily in the belly of the whale<sup>6</sup> and spiritually, witnesses to the same truth, saying, “Thou hast cast me forth into the depth, in the heart of the sea, and a flood hath compassed me: all Thy surges and Thy waves have passed over me. And I said, I am cast away from the sight of Thine eyes: but yet I shall see Thy holy temple again”—this is the purgation of the soul that it may see God—the waters have compassed me even to the soul, the depth hath enclosed me, the sea hath covered my head. I am descended to the extreme parts of the mountains: the bars of the earth have shut me up for ever.”<sup>7</sup> The bars of the earth here are the imperfections of the soul which hinder it from having any joy in this sweet contemplation.

5. The fourth kind of pain is caused by another excellence peculiar to this dim contemplation, a sense of its majesty and greatness,<sup>8</sup> which makes the soul conscious of the other extreme, its own poverty and misery; this is one of the chief sufferings of this purgation. The soul is conscious of a profound emptiness, and destitution of the three kinds of goods, natural, temporal, and spiritual, which are ordained for its comfort;<sup>9</sup> it sees itself in the midst of the opposite evils, miserable imperfections and aridities, emptiness of the understanding, and abandonment of the spirit in darkness.

6. Inasmuch as God is now purifying the soul in its sensual and spiritual substance, its interior and exterior powers, it is necessary for it that it should be in all its relations empty, poor, and abandoned, in aridity, emptiness, and darkness. For the sensual part is purified in aridities, the faculties in the emptiness of their powers, and the spirit in the thick darkness.

7. All this God brings about by means of this dim contemplation, in which the soul is made to suffer from the failure and withdrawal of its natural powers, which is a most distressing pain. It is like that of a person being suffocated, or hindered from

breathing. But this contemplation is also purifying the soul, undoing or emptying it, or consuming it, as fire consumes the rust and moldiness of the metal, all the affections and habits of imperfection which it had contracted in the whole course of its life. But inasmuch as these habits are deeply rooted in the substance of the soul, the grievous interior sufferings and trials<sup>10</sup> it has to undergo are heavy, and are, in addition to the destitution and emptiness, natural and spiritual, of which I have spoken.

8. The words of the prophet Ezekiel are now fulfilled: "Heap together the bones which I will burn with fire: the flesh shall be consumed, and the whole composition shall be sodden, and the bones shall dry away."<sup>11</sup> This describes the pain which the soul suffers in the sensual and spiritual parts when in this state of emptiness and poverty. Then the prophet proceeds, saying: "Set it also upon hot burning coals empty, that the brass thereof may wax hot and be melted; and let the filth of it be melted in the midst thereof, and let the rust thereof be consumed."<sup>12</sup>

9. This is the heavy trial of the soul in the purifying fires of contemplation. The prophet says that, in order to purge away and consume the filth of the affections which are within the soul, it is necessary for it in a certain way to be annihilated and undone, because its passions and affections have become natural to it. The soul, therefore, because it is purified in this furnace, like gold in a crucible, according to the words of Wisdom, "as gold in the furnace He hath proved them,"<sup>13</sup> feels itself utterly consumed in its innermost substance in this absolute poverty wherein it is as it were lost. This is taught us by the Psalmist, saying of himself: "Save me, O God, because waters are entered unto my soul. I stick fast in the mire of the depth; and there is no sure standing. I am come into the depth of the sea; and a tempest hath overwhelmed me. I have labored crying, my jaws are made hoarse, my eyes have failed, whilst I hope in my God."<sup>14</sup>

10. Here God is humbling the soul that He may exalt it much hereafter, and if it were not His will that these feelings, when they rise, should be quickly lulled again, the soul would almost immediately depart from the body, but they occur only at intervals in their greatest violence. They are occasionally felt so acutely that the soul seems to see hell and perdition open before it. Of these are they who go down alive into hell and have their purgatory in this life; for this is the purgation to be endured there.<sup>15</sup> And thus the soul which passes through this state in the present life, either enters not into purgatory, or is detained there but a moment, for one hour here is of greater profit than many there.

*The Same Subject Continued.  
Other Afflictions and Trials of the Will*

*1. Fifth pain: the memory of past happiness. Job. 2. Jeremiah. 3. The suffering soul worthy of compassion. 4. It derives no relief from spiritual advice. 5. God the only consolation. 6. Duration and intermission of spiritual sufferings. 7. One intense emotion excludes its contrary. 8. The soul still conscious of imperfections and of danger. 9. Vicissitudes of joy and of sorrow. 10. The pain increased.*

THE afflictions and distress of the will now are also very great; they occasionally pierce the soul with a sudden recollection of the evils that environ it, and of the uncertainty of relief. To this is super-added the memory of past happiness; for they who enter this night have, generally, had much sweetness in God, and served Him greatly;<sup>1</sup> but now, to see themselves strangers to so much happiness, and unable to recover it, causes them the greatest affliction.

2. Job also, having learnt this by experience, declares it in these words: “I, sometime that wealthy one, suddenly am broken; He hath held my neck, broken me, and set me to Himself, as it were a mark. He hath compassed me with His spears, He hath wounded my loins, He hath not spared, and hath poured out on the earth my bowels. He hath cut me with wound upon wound: He hath come violently upon me as it were a giant. I have sewed sackcloth upon my skin, and have covered my flesh with ashes. My face is swollen with weeping, and my eyelids are dim.”<sup>2</sup> So many and so great are the torments of this night, and so many the places in the Holy Writings, which may be quoted to this effect, that time and strength would fail me were I to enumerate them. For no doubt, all that can be said will fall short; something may be gathered on the matter from the texts already before us.

2. And now to conclude the subject of the first line of the stanza, and to show yet a little more<sup>3</sup> what this night is to the soul, I will repeat how it was felt by the prophet Jeremiah, who, great though he was, bewailed it in many words, saying thus:<sup>4</sup> “I, the man that see my poverty in the rod of His indignation. He hath led me and brought me into darkness, and not into light. Only against me He hath turned, and hath converted His hand all the day. He hath made my skin old and my flesh; He hath broken my bones. He hath built round about me, and He hath compassed me with gall and labor. In dark places He hath placed me as the everlasting dead. He hath built round about against me, I go not forth. He hath aggravated my fetters. Yea, and when I shall cry and ask, He hath excluded my prayer. He hath shut up my ways with square stones. He hath subverted my paths. He is become unto me a bear lying in wait; a lion in secret places. He hath subverted my paths, and hath His bow, and set me as a mark for the arrow. He hath shot in my reins the daughters of His quiver. I am made a derision to all my people, their song all the day. He hath replenished me with bitterness, He hath inebriated me with wormwood. And He hath broken my teeth by number; He hath fed me with ashes. And my soul is repelled from peace; I have forgotten good things. And I said: Mine end is perished and mine hope from our Lord. Remember my poverty and transgression, the wormwood and the gall. Remembering I will be mindful; and my soul shall languish in me.”<sup>5</sup>

3. These are the lamentations of the prophet over these pains and trials, whereby he most vividly depicts the sufferings of the soul, which come upon it in this purgation and spiritual night. That soul is worthy of all compassion which God leads into this dreadful and horrible night. For, although it is well with it because of the great blessing of which this night is the source, for, as Job says, God will raise up good things for it out of this darkness, and bring light over the shadow of death: “Who revealeth profound things out of darkness, and bringeth forth the shadow of death into light”;<sup>6</sup> so that his light shall be as the darkness; “the darkness thereof so also the light thereof,” as David speaks.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, because of the excessive pain it endures, and the great uncertainty of relief, it imagines now, as the prophet says, that its calamities will never come to an end. God, in the words of David, having made it to “dwell in darkness as those that have been dead of old,”<sup>8</sup> the spirit being in anguish within it, and “the heart within” it “troubled,” it is a very painful and pitiable state.

4. Besides, the soul derives no consolation now in the advice that may be given it, or from its spiritual director,

because of the loneliness and desolation of this dark night. Though its confessor may set before it in many ways good reasons why it should be comforted because of the blessings which these pains supply, the soul will not believe him. For as it is so filled with and overwhelmed by its sense of these evils, whereby it discerns so clearly its own misery, it imagines that its spiritual director, not seeing that which itself sees and feels, speaks as he does without comprehending its state, and, instead of being comforted, is pained anew, for it considers that his counsel cannot relieve its misery; and in truth so it is, for until our Lord shall have perfected the purification of the soul, according to His will, no help and no remedy can be of any service or profit in this pain.

5. Moreover, the soul can do so little in this state; like a prisoner in a gloomy dungeon, bound hand and foot, it cannot stir, neither can it see or feel any relief, either from above or below, until the spirit is softened, humbled, and purified; until it becomes so refined, simple, and pure, as to become one with the Spirit of God in that degree of the union of love which He in His mercy intends for it, and corresponding to which is the greater or less violence, the longer or shorter duration, of this purgation.

6. But if this purgation is to be real it will last, notwithstanding its vehemence, for some years, but admitting of intermissions and relief, during which, by the dispensation of God, the dim contemplation divested of its purgative form and character assumes that of the illuminative and of love. Under this form of it, the soul, like one escaped from the dungeons of its prison into the comfort of space and freedom, enjoys the sweetness of peace, and the loving tenderness of God in the flowing abundance of spiritual communications. This is to the soul a sign of the spiritual health which is being wrought within by this purgation, and a foretaste of the abundance it hopes for. So much so is this at times that it thinks all its trials are over. For such is the nature of spiritual things in the soul, when they are most purely spiritual, that the soul thinks when trials return they will never end, and that all its blessings have perished; and when it prospers in its spiritual course it thinks all its calamities are past, and that it shall always abound in good things. Thus it was with David when he said: "In my abundance I said: I shall never be moved."<sup>9</sup>

7. The reason of this is that the actual presence of one thing in the mind is naturally inconsistent with the presence and sense of its contrary; this is not so much so in the sensual part of the soul, because of the weakness of its apprehension. But as the spirit is not yet wholly purified and cleansed from the imperfections contracted by its lower nature, though more consistent now, it is liable to further sufferings, so far as it is under the dominion of these affections, as we see in the many afflictions and distress of David after the change, though he had said in the day of his prosperity, "I shall never be moved."

8. In the same way the soul, amidst the abundance of spiritual blessings, but not observing the root of imperfection and impurity which still remains, thinks that all its trials are over. This thought, however, is of rare occurrence, for until the spiritual purgation is complete, the sweet communications are rarely so abundant as to conceal the root that remains behind, in such a way that the soul shall not be inwardly conscious of some deficiency, or that something still is to be done. Nor is the communication such as to allow it to enjoy the relief that is offered it perfectly, for it feels as if an enemy were lurking within, who, though he may be as if subdued and asleep, the soul fears may yet return in his strength and assault it as before.

9. And so it comes to pass, for when the soul is most secure, and least expects it,<sup>10</sup> it returns, drags down the soul, and then plunges it at once into another affliction heavier, darker, and sadder than the previous one, and which, perhaps, will be of longer continuance. The soul again is convinced that all its good is gone from it for ever. Experience cannot teach it: the blessings that followed its former trials, during which it thought that its sufferings would never end, cannot hinder it from believing, during its present trials, that all its good has perished, and that it will never be again with it as it was before. For, as I am saying, this belief, so persistent, is wrought in the soul by the present impression made on the mind, which destroys within it all that is contrary thereto. This is the reason why the souls in purgatory suffer much at the thought they shall never leave that place and their torments shall never cease. For although they possess the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity as habits, they derive no benefit or consolation from any acts of these virtues on account of the ever-present sense of their pain and of the privation of God; even if they succeed in seeing how much they love God, yet this is no source of consolation because it is by no means certain to them that God loves them nor that they are worthy of His love; on the contrary, seeing themselves deprived of Him and given over to their misery, they discover good reason within themselves for being abhorred and rejected by Him for ever.<sup>11</sup>

10. Thus the soul in this purgation, though it seems to love God greatly, and is ready to die for Him a thousand deaths—and that is true, for souls thus tried love God with great sincerity, nevertheless they find no relief, but rather an increase of pain herein. For seeking God alone, and naught else, seeing also its own great misery, it cannot believe that God loves it, nor that it is, or ever will be, worthy of love,<sup>12</sup> but rather is convinced that there is that in it which should make it hated not only of God, but of all creatures also for ever; it grieves to see that of itself it deserves to be abandoned of Him Whom it so loves and so longs for.



*Of Other Sufferings Which Distress the Soul in This State*

*1. Sixth pain: inability to fix the attention on God or divine things. 2. Loss of mental power. 3. Annihilation. 4. Faculties of the soul absorbed in God. 5. The light of reason dim in the light of God. 6. An analogy: natural light perceptible only when reflected by objects. 7. Marks of a purified mind.*

ANOTHER source of much affliction and distress to the soul in this state is that, as the dark night hinders the exercise of the faculties and affections, it cannot lift up the heart and mind to God as before, nor pray to Him. It thinks itself to be in that state described by Jeremiah when he said, “Thou hast set a cloud before Thee, that prayer may not pass.”<sup>1</sup> This is the meaning of the words quoted before<sup>2</sup>—“He hath shut up my ways with square stones.”<sup>3</sup> If at any time it prays, it prays with so much aridity, and without sweetness, so as to think that God neither hears nor regards it; as the prophet tells us in the same place, saying, “Yea, and when I shall cry, and ask, He excludeth my prayer.”<sup>4</sup> And, in truth, this is not the time for the soul to speak to God,<sup>5</sup> but, in the words of Jeremiah, to put its “mouth in the dust,”<sup>6</sup> suffering in patience this purgation.

2. It is God Himself Who is now working in the soul, and the soul is therefore powerless.<sup>7</sup> Hence it comes that it cannot pray or give much attention to divine things. Neither can it attend to temporal matters, for it falls into frequent distractions, and the memory is so profoundly weakened, that many hours pass by without its knowing what it has done or thought, what it is doing or is about to do; nor can it give much heed to what it is occupied with, notwithstanding all its efforts.

3. Inasmuch, then, as not only the understanding is purified from its imperfect perceptions, and the will from its affections, but the memory, also, from all its knowledge and reflections, it is necessary that the soul should be annihilated herein, that the words of the Psalmist, when he was in this purgation, may be fulfilled: “I am brought to nothing, and I knew not.”<sup>8</sup> This “knowing not” extends to these follies and failures of the memory. These wanderings and failures of the memory are the result of interior recollection, by which the soul is absorbed in contemplation. For in order to prepare the soul, and temper it divinely in all its powers for the divine union of love, it must, first of all, be absorbed with all its powers in the divine and dim spiritual light of contemplation, and be thus detached from all affection for, and apprehension of, created things. This continues ordinarily in proportion to the intensity of its contemplation.

4. Thus, then, the more pure and simple the divine light when it beats on the soul,<sup>9</sup> the more does it darken it, empty it, and annihilate it, as to all its apprehensions and affections, whether they regard heavenly or earthly things. And also, the less pure and simple the light, the less is the soul darkened and annihilated. It seems strange to say, that the purer and clearer the supernatural and divine light the more dark is it in the soul, and that it is less so when less pure.

5. But this may be easily explained; if we keep in mind the saying of the philosopher that supernatural things are more dark to the understanding the more clear and evident they are in themselves. A likeness taken from ordinary natural light will make this quite clear. A sunbeam coming in by the window is perceived the less distinctly the more pure and free from atoms and motes the air is, but the more of these there are, the more distinct is the beam to the eye. The reason is that we do not see light itself, but by means of it we see the objects on which it falls, and these reflecting it, the light itself becomes a visible object; had it not struck them it would itself remain invisible. Thus, if the beam entered by one window, passed through the middle of the room without encountering any object that could reflect it, no atoms nor even air, and went out by a window opposite, the room would not be lit up, neither would the beam be visible. On the contrary, if we think well of it, the line of the beam would be plunged in deeper darkness, for not only would it not be visible but it would absorb what faint light there might be, for as we suppose there are no objects whatever to reflect it.<sup>10</sup> Thus this ray of divine contemplation, transcending as it does the natural powers, striking the soul with its divine light, makes it dark, and deprives it of all the natural affections and apprehensions which it previously entertained in its own natural light. Under these circumstances, the soul is left not only in darkness but in emptiness also, as to its powers and desires, both natural and spiritual, and in this emptiness and darkness is purified and enlightened by the divine spiritual light, but it does not imagine that it has it; yea, rather, it thinks itself to be in

darkness, as we have said of the sunbeam which, though passing through the middle of a room, cannot be seen if the air is quite pure and there are no objects on which it may fall.

6. However, the spiritual light falling on the soul if there is anything to reflect it,<sup>11</sup> that is, upon any matter, however small, of perfection, which presents itself to the understanding or a decision to be made as to the truth or falsehood of anything, the soul sees it at once, and understands the matter more clearly than it ever did before it entered into this darkness. In the same way the soul discerns the spiritual light which is given it that it may easily recognize its own imperfection; thus, the ray of light in a room, which we said was of itself not so visible,<sup>12</sup> but when the hand or any other object is held before it, the hand is seen forthwith, and the light of the sun is known to be there.

7. Then, because this spiritual light is so clear, pure, and diffused, neither confined to, nor specially related to, any particular matter of the understanding, natural or divine,<sup>13</sup> seeing that with respect to all such matters the powers of the soul are empty and as if they did not exist—the soul in great ease and freedom discerns and searches into everything high or low, that is presented to it; and for that reason the Apostle says, “The Spirit searcheth all things, even the profundities of God”;<sup>14</sup> for it is of this pure and diffused wisdom that we are to understand that which the Holy Ghost spake by the mouth of the wise man, “Wisdom reacheth everywhere by reason of her clearness”;<sup>15</sup> that is, because not connected with any particular object of the understanding or affection. The characteristic of a mind purified and annihilated as to all particular objects of affection and of the understanding, is to have no pleasure in, or knowledge of, anything in particular; to abide in emptiness and darkness; to embrace all things in its grand comprehensiveness, that it may fulfill mystically the words of the Apostle, “having nothing and possessing all things,”<sup>16</sup> for such poverty of spirit merits such a blessing.



*How This Night Enlightens the Mind, Though It Brings Darkness over It*

*1. Light, love, and liberty found in the night of the spirit. Illustration from the primary elements of matter. 2. One selfish affection or apprehension may make perfection impossible. 3. Because the natural cannot itself reach the supernatural 4. Purification of grace equal to the habits of nature. 5. Continuation. 6. The soul prepared by suffering for the spirit of God. 7. The soul—an exile in the world—at home in God. 8. Continuation. 9. In the spiritual night false peace is lost, true peace is found. 10. Unsettling. 11. Example of Job. 12. Great works require great labor. 13. Beginning of contemplation painful. Self the cause of suffering.*

IT REMAINS for me now to explain that this blessed night, though it darkens the mind, does so only to give it light in everything; and though it humbles it and makes it miserable, it does so only to raise it up and set it free; and though it impoverishes it and empties it of all its natural self and liking, it does so only to enable it to reach forward divinely to the possession and fruition of all things, both of heaven and earth, in perfect liberty of spirit. As it is fitting that the primary elements, that they may enter into the composition of all natural substances, should have no color, taste, nor smell peculiar to themselves, in order that they may combine with all colors, all tastes, and all smells, so the mind must be pure, simple, and detached from all kinds of natural affections, actual and habitual, in order that it may be able to participate freely in the largeness of spirit of the divine wisdom, wherein by reason of its pureness it tastes of the sweetness of all things in a certain preeminent way. And without this purgation it is altogether impossible to taste of the abundance of these spiritual delights. For one single affection remaining in the soul, or any one matter to which the mind clings either habitually or actually, is sufficient to prevent all perception and all communication of the tender and interior sweetness of the spirit of love, which contains within itself all sweetness supremely.

2. As the children of Israel, merely on account of that single affection for, and remembrance of, the fleshpots of Egypt, could not taste the delicious bread of angels, the manna in the desert, which, as the divine writings tell us, had “the sweetness of all taste,” and “turned to that every man would,”<sup>1</sup> so the mind which is still subject to any actual or habitual affection or particular or narrow mode of apprehending, or understanding anything, cannot taste the sweetness of the spirit of liberty, according to the desire of the will. The reason is this: the affections, feelings, and apprehensions of the perfect spirit, being of so high an order and specially divine, are of another kind and different from those which are natural; and in order to be actually and habitually enjoyed, require the annihilation of the latter, as happens with two contraries which cannot coexist in the same subject.<sup>2</sup>

3. It is therefore very expedient and necessary, if the soul is to advance to these heights, that the dark night of contemplation should first bring it to nothing, and undo it in all its meannesses, bringing it into darkness, aridities, loneliness, and emptiness; for the light that is to be given it is a certain divine light of the highest nature, surpassing all natural light, and not naturally cognizable by the understanding. If the understanding is to be united with that light, and become divine in the state of perfection, it must first of all be purified and annihilated as to its natural light, which must be brought actually into darkness by means of this dim contemplation.

4. This darkness must continue so long as it is necessary to destroy the habit, long ago contracted, of understanding things in a natural way, and until the divine enlightening shall have taken its place. And therefore inasmuch as the power of understanding, previously exerted, is natural, the result is that the darkness now endured is awful, and most afflictive, as it were solid,<sup>3</sup> because it reaches to, and is felt in, the innermost depths of the spirit. In the same way, inasmuch as the affection of love, communicated in the divine union, is divine, and therefore most spiritual, subtle, delicate, and most interior, surpassing all sense and affection, natural and imperfect, of the will and every desire of the same, it is necessary for the perception and fruition,<sup>4</sup> in the union of love, of this divine affection and most exquisite delight, that the will, by nature incapable of it,<sup>5</sup> should be first purified and annihilated, as to all its affections and feelings, left in darkness and distress proportional to the intensity of the habit of natural affections it had acquired, in respect both of human and divine things.

5. And this must be done, in order that the will, in the fire of dim contemplation, wasted, withered, and deprived of all selfishness—like the liver of the fish which Tobiah laid on the burning coals<sup>6</sup>—may acquire a pure and simple disposition, a purified and sound taste, so as to feel those sublime and wonderful touches of divine love when it shall be divinely transformed; all its former contrarieties actual and habitual being expelled.

6. Moreover, in order to attain to the divine union, for which the dark night disposes it, the soul must be endowed and replenished with a certain glorious magnificence in the divine communication, which includes innumerable blessings and joys, surpassing all the abundance which the soul can naturally possess (it being too weak and impure)<sup>7</sup>—so speak the prophet Isaiah and St. Paul, “Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man what things God hath prepared for them that love Him.”<sup>8</sup> It is necessary for it that it should be first brought into a state of emptiness and spiritual poverty, detached from all help and consolation in all the things of heaven and earth, that being thus empty it may be really poor in spirit and divested of the old man, and may live that new and blessed life to which it attains in this dark night which is the state of union with God.

7. And because the soul is to attain to the possession of a certain sense, and divine knowledge, most generous and full of sweetness, of all human and divine things which do not fall within the commonsense and natural perceptions of the soul—it views them with different eyes now; as the light and grace of the Holy Ghost differ from those of sense, the divine from the human—it is necessary that the spirit should be brought low, and inured to hardships in all that relates to the natural and common sense. It must suffer hardships and afflictions in the purgative contemplation, and the memory must become a stranger to all pleasing and peaceful knowledge, with a most interior sense and feeling of being a stranger and a pilgrim here, so that all things shall seem strange to it, and other than they were wont to seem.

8. For this night is drawing the spirit away from its ordinary and common sense of things, that it may draw it towards the divine sense, which is a stranger and an alien to all human ways; so much so that the soul seems to be carried out of itself. At other times it looks upon itself as if under the influence of some charm or spell, and is amazed at all that it hears and sees, which seem to it to be most strange and out of the way, though in reality they are, as they usually are, the same. The reason is this: the soul has become a stranger to the ordinary sense of things, in order that being brought to nothing therein, it might be informed in the divine. Now this belongs more to the next life than to this.

9. The soul suffers all these afflictive purgations of the spirit that it may be born again to the life of the spirit through the divine inflowing, and in these pangs bring forth the spirit of salvation, fulfilling the words of Isaiah: “So are we become in Thy presence, O Lord. We have conceived, and been as it were in labor, and, have brought forth the spirit”<sup>9</sup> of salvation. Moreover, as in the night of contemplation the soul is prepared for that tranquility and inward peace which is such and so full of delight as, in the words of Scripture, to “pass all understanding,”<sup>10</sup> it is necessary for the soul that all its former peace, which, because involved in so many imperfections, was no peace, though it seemed to be a twofold peace, namely, of sense and spirit—(that is, seeing itself filled with the spiritual treasures of this peace of the senses and of the soul, it, being as yet imperfect, imagined itself as having already acquired this twofold peace)<sup>11</sup>—because it was pleasing, should first of all be purified, and the soul withdrawn from and disturbed in that imperfect peace, as Jeremiah felt and lamented in the words cited before to express the trials of the night that is now past, namely: “My soul is repelled from peace.”<sup>12</sup>

10. This is a painful unsettling, full of misgivings, imaginations, and inward struggles, in which the soul, at the sight and in the consciousness of its own misery, imagines itself to be lost, and all its good to have perished for ever. In this state the spirit is pierced by sorrow so profound as to occasion strong spiritual groans and cries, to which at times it gives utterance, and tears break forth, if there be any strength left for them, though this relief is but rarely granted. The royal prophet David has well described this state, being one who had great experience of it, saying, “I am afflicted and humbled exceedingly; I roared with the groaning of my heart.”<sup>13</sup> This roaring proceeds from great pain; for sometimes the sudden and sharp recollection of the miseries that environ the soul, makes it rise and surround the affections of the soul<sup>14</sup> with such pain and grief that I know not how it can be explained otherwise than by the words of Job: “as overflowing waters so is my roaring.”<sup>15</sup> For as waters sometimes overflow, drown and fill all places, so this roaring, and sense of pain, become occasionally so strong as to flow over and into the soul, filling all its deepest affections and energies with spiritual pain and sorrow which defy all exaggeration.

11. Such is the work wrought in the soul by this night that hideth the hopes of the light of day. It was in reference to it that Job said, “In the night my mouth is pierced with sorrows, and they that feed upon me do not sleep.”<sup>16</sup> The mouth here is the will, pierced by these sorrows which cease not to tear the soul, neither do they sleep, for the doubts and misgivings which harass it are never at rest.

12. This warfare and combat are deep, because the peace hoped for is most deep: the spiritual sorrow is interior, refined, and pure, because the love to be enjoyed must be also most interior and pure. The more interior and perfect the work, the more interior, perfect, and pure must the labor be that produces it; and the stronger the building, the more solid it is. “My soul fadeth within myself,” says Job, “and the days of affliction possess me.”<sup>17</sup> So, in the same way, because the soul has to attain to the enjoyment and possession, in the state of perfection to which it journeys in this purgative night, of innumerable

blessings, of gifts, and virtues, both in the substance of the soul and in the powers thereof, it is necessary that it should first consider and feel itself generally a stranger to and deprived of them all, empty and poor,<sup>18</sup> and regard them as so far beyond its reach as to be persuaded that it never can attain to them, and that all goodness is perished from it. This is the meaning of those words of Jeremiah, “I have forgotten good things.”<sup>19</sup>

13. Let us now see why the light of contemplation, so sweet and lovely to the soul that nothing is more desirable—for it is that, as I said before,<sup>20</sup> whereby the divine union takes place, and whereby the soul in the state of perfection finds all the good it desires—produces, when it strikes the soul, these painful beginnings and terrible effects. The answer is easy, and is already given in part; there is nothing in contemplation and the divine inflowing, to cause pain, but rather much sweetness and joy, as the soul will find later. The cause is the imperfection and weakness of the soul, and dispositions not fit for the reception of this sweetness. And so, when the divine light beats upon the soul, it makes it suffer in the way described.

*Explanation of This Purgation by a Comparison*

*1. Analogy of the action of fire. 2. The divine fire. 3. The same cause purifies and transforms the soul 4. Weakness and imperfection the source of suffering. 5. Text. 6. Cause of purgatory. 7. Transformation of love equal to purification by suffering. 8. Deeper fire, greater sufferings. 9. Cause of absence of consolation. 10. The soul conscious of remaining imperfections. 11. To die or to suffer.*

TO MAKE what I have said, and what I have still to say, more clear, it is well to observe here that this purgative and loving knowledge, or divine light, of which I have spoken, is to the soul which it is purifying, in order to unite it perfectly to itself, as fire is to fuel which it is transforming into itself. The first action of material fire on fuel is to dry it, to expel from it all water and all moisture. It blackens it at once and soils it, producing a disagreeable smell,<sup>1</sup> and drying it by little and little, makes it light and consumes all its foulness and blackness which are contrary to itself. Finally, having heated and set on fire its outward surface, it transforms the whole into itself, and makes it beautiful as itself. The fuel under these conditions retains neither active nor passive qualities of its own, except bulk and weight, and assumes all the properties and acts of fire. It becomes dry, being dry it glows, and glowing, burns; luminous, it gives light, and burns more quickly than before. All this is the property and effect of fire.

2. It is in this way we have to reason about the divine fire of contemplative love which, before it unites with and transforms the soul into itself, purges away all its contrary qualities. It expels its impurities, blackens it and obscures it, and thus its condition is apparently worse than it was before, more impure and offensive.<sup>2</sup> For while the divine purgation is removing all the evil and vicious humors, which, because so deeply rooted and settled in the soul, were neither seen nor felt, but now, in order to their expulsion and annihilation, are rendered clearly visible in the dim light of the divine contemplation, the soul—though not worse in itself, nor in the sight of God—seeing at last what it never saw before, looks upon itself not only as unworthy of His regard, but even as a loathsome object and that God does loathe it. By this comparison we shall be able to understand much that I have said, and purpose to say.

3. In the first place, we can see how that very light, and that loving knowledge which unites the soul and transforms it into itself, is the same which purifies and prepares it; for the fire that transforms the fuel and incorporates it with itself, is the very same which also at the first prepared it for that end.

4. In the second place, we may see that these sufferings of the soul do not proceed from the divine wisdom—it being written, “All good things came to me together with her,”<sup>3</sup> but from its own weakness and imperfection, being incapable, previous to its purgation, of receiving this divine light, sweetness, and delight; and that is the reason why its sufferings are so great. The fuel is not transformed into fire, at the instant of their contact, if it be not previously prepared for burning.

5. This is the experience of the Wise Man, who thus describes his sufferings before his union with, and possession of, wisdom: “My soul hath wrestled in it. . . . My belly was troubled in seeking it; therefore shall I possess a good possession.”<sup>4</sup>

6. In the third place we learn by the way how souls suffer in purgatory. The fire, though applied, would have no power over them if they had no imperfections<sup>5</sup> for which they must suffer, for these are the matter on which that fire seizes; when that matter is consumed there is nothing more to burn. So is it here, when all imperfections are removed, the suffering of the soul ceases, and in its place comes joy.

7. In the fourth place, we learn that the soul, the more it is purified and cleansed in the fire of love, the more it glows with it. The better the fuel is prepared for the fire the better it burns. The soul, however, is not always conscious of this burning of love within it, but only now and then, when the contemplation is less profound, for the soul is then able to observe, and even to delight in, the work that is being wrought, because it is visible; the hand of the artificer seems to be withdrawn from the work, and the iron taken out of the furnace, so as to show in some measure the work that is being wrought. Then, too, the soul is able to see in itself that good which it did not see while the process was going on. Thus, when the flame ceases to envelop the fuel, it is possible to see clearly how much of it has been burnt.

8. In the fifth place, we shall also find by this comparison that which has been said before,<sup>6</sup> namely, how true it is that after these consolations, the soul suffers again more intensely and keenly than it did before. For after the manifestation of the work that has been done, when the more outward imperfections have been expelled, the fire of love returns again to purge and consume that which is more interior. The suffering of the soul herein becomes more penetrating, deep, and spiritual, according as it refines away the more profound, subtle, and deeply rooted interior imperfections of the spirit. It is here as with the fuel in the fire, the deeper the fire penetrates the greater is its force and energy in disposing the inmost substance of the fuel for its own possession of it.

9. In the sixth place will be seen the reason why the soul believes that all its goodness has been consumed and that it is full of evil, since nothing but bitterness penetrates it at this time; thus neither air nor any other object touches the burning wood, only the fire which consumes it. But at those moments of respite the joy will be more interior because the purification has gone deeper.<sup>7</sup>

10. In the seventh place, we shall learn that the soul, though it rejoices intensely in these intervals of peace—so much so that it seems at times, as we have said, to think its trials over, never to return, even while it is certain that they will soon return—cannot but feel, if it observes a single root of imperfection behind—and sometimes it must do so—that its joy is not full. It seems as if that root threatened to spring up anew, and when that is so, it does so quickly.

11. Finally, that which still remains to be purified and enlightened within cannot well be concealed from the soul in the presence of that which has been already purified; so also that portion of the fuel which is still to be set on fire is very different from that which the flame has purified. And when this purgation commences anew in the inmost soul, it is not strange that it should consider all its goodness to have perished, and think that it can never recover its former prosperity; for in most interior sufferings all outward goodness is hidden from it.

12. Keeping this comparison, then, before our eyes, with that which I have already said,<sup>8</sup> on the first line of this stanza, concerning this dark night and its fearful characteristics, it may be well to leave the subject of these afflictions of the soul, and to enter on the matter of the fruit of its tears and their blessed properties, of which the soul sings in the second line.

***Begins the Explanation of the Second Line Of the First Stanza, and Shows How a Vehement Passion of Divine Love Is the Fruit Of These Sharp Afflictions of the Soul***

*1. Foretaste of God in the night of the spirit. 2. Love of God infused into the purified soul. 3. Continuation. 4. Continuation. 5. Concentration of powers of the soul on God. 6. No satiety in divine love. 7. Anxious longing of the soul for God. 8. Its causes: spiritual darkness and infused love of God.*

*With Anxious Love Inflamed*

IN THIS line the soul speaks of the fire of love of which we have spoken,<sup>1</sup> and which, in the night of painful contemplation, seizes upon it as material fire on the fuel it burns. This burning, though in a certain way resembling that which, as we explained before,<sup>2</sup> takes place in the sensual part of the soul, is still, in one sense, as different from this, of which I am now speaking, as the soul is from the body, the spiritual from the sensual. For this is a certain fire of love in the spirit whereby the soul, amidst these dark trials, feels itself wounded to the quick by this strong love divine with a certain sense and foretaste of God, though it understands nothing distinctly, because, as I have said,<sup>3</sup> the understanding is in darkness.

2. The spirit is now conscious of deep love, for this spiritual burning produces the passion of it. And inasmuch as this love is infused passively rather than actively,<sup>4</sup> the soul corresponds only passively with it, and thus a strong passion of love is begotten within it.<sup>5</sup> This love has in it something of the most perfect union with God, and thus partakes in some measure of its properties, which are more especially actions of God received in the soul rather than of the soul, in which they subsist passively, the soul giving its consent thereto.<sup>6</sup>

3. But this warmth and force and temper and passion of love, or burning, as the soul calls it, are solely the work of God Who is entering into union with it. The more the desires are restrained, subdued, and disabled for the enjoyment of the things of heaven and earth, the more room does this love find in the soul, and better the dispositions for its reception, so that it may unite itself with that soul, and wound it. This takes place, as has been said before,<sup>7</sup> during the dark purgation in a wonderful way, for God has so weaned the faculties, and they are now so recollected in Him, that they are unable to take pleasure as they like in anything whatever.

4. All this is the work of God; wrought with a view to withdraw the faculties of the soul from all objects whatever, and to concentrate them upon Himself, that the soul may acquire greater strength and fitness for the strong union of love of God which He is communicating in the purgative way; and in which the soul must love Him with all its strength and desire of sense and spirit, which it could never do if the faculties thereof were dissipated by other satisfactions. The Psalmist, therefore, that he might be able to receive this strong love of the union with God, says unto Him, "I will keep my strength for Thee";<sup>8</sup> that is, all my capacity and desires, the strength of my faculties, neither will I suffer them to do or rejoice in anything but Thee.

5. Here we may perceive, in some degree, how great and how vehement is this burning of love in the spirit when God gathers and collects together all the strength, faculties, and desires of the soul, both spiritual and sensual, so that all this unison may use all its energies and all its forces in this love, and so come to satisfy truly, and in perfection, the first commandment, which, neglecting nothing that belongs to man, and shutting out nothing that is his from this love, says, namely, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength."<sup>9</sup>

6. When all the desires and energies of the soul are thus recollected in this burning of love, and the soul itself touched, wounded, and set on fire with love, in them all, what must the movements and affections of these desires and energies be when they are thus wounded and burning in this strong love, when that love does not satiate them, when they are in darkness and doubt about it, and suffering also, beyond all question, a more grievous hunger, like the dogs which, as David says, not finding



their fill of this love, “go round about the city howling and crying.”<sup>10</sup> For the touch of this love and of the divine fire so dries up the spirit, and enkindles its longing to satisfy its thirst, that it turns upon itself a thousand times, and longs for God in a thousand ways, as David did when he said, “For Thee my soul hath thirsted, for Thee my flesh, O how many ways”;<sup>11</sup> that is, in desire. Another version reads, “My soul thirsteth after Thee, my soul is dying for Thee.”

7. This is the reason why the soul says, “With anxious love inflamed.” In all its works and thoughts, in all its employments and on every occasion, the soul loves and longs in many ways, and this longing also is manifold in its forms, always and everywhere present; the soul has no rest, feeling itself to be wounded and on fire with anxious love; its state is thus described by holy Job: “As a servant desireth the shadow, as the hired man tarrieth for the end of his work, so I also have had vain months, and have numbered to myself laborious nights. If I sleep, I shall say, When shall I arise? and again I shall expect the evening, and shall be replenished with sorrows even until darkness.”<sup>12</sup> The soul is discontented with itself, with heaven and with earth, being replenished with sorrows even until the darkness of which Job is here speaking. That darkness, speaking in a spiritual sense, and according to the matter which I am discussing, is distress and suffering without the comfort of any certain hope of any light and spiritual good.

8. The anxieties and sufferings of the soul while thus on fire with love are the greater, because of their twofold origin; the spiritual darkness which envelops it is one, and that afflicts it with doubts and misgivings. The love of God which sets it on fire is the other, which stirs it with the wound of love and makes it burn marvelously. These two kinds of suffering are thus referred to by Isaiah, being in a like condition: “My soul hath desired Thee in the night; that is, in misery. This is one kind of pain which proceeds from the dark night, ‘Yea, and with my spirit in my heart I will watch to Thee in the morning.’”<sup>13</sup> This is the other kind of suffering in desire and anxiety, which proceeds from love, in the bowels of the spirit; that is, the spiritual affections. The soul, however, amidst these gloomy and loving pains, is conscious of a certain companionship and inward strength which attends upon it and so invigorates it that if the burden of this oppressive darkness be removed, it oftentimes feels itself desolate, empty, and weak. The reason is that the force and courage communicated to the soul flow passively from the dark fire of love which assails it, and so, when that fire ceases to assail it, the darkness, the strength, and fire of love at the same time cease in the soul.

***Shows How This Awful Night Is a Purgatory, and How in It the Divine Wisdom Illuminates Men on Earth with That Light in Which the Angels Are Purified and Enlightened in Heaven***

*1. Two purgatories. 2. The infused wisdom of love. 3. Infused love and knowledge of the angels. 4. Of men. 5. Increasing in holiness is advancing in knowledge. 6. Joy of the union of intellect and will in God.*

**W**HAT I have said will enable us to see how the dark night of loving fire purifies in the darkness, and how the soul in the darkness is set on fire. We shall also see that, as the dark and material fires in the next life purify the spirit,<sup>1</sup> so the loving, dark, and spiritual fires here purify and cleanse the soul.<sup>2</sup> The difference is that in the next world they are purified by fire, and here, purified and enlightened by love. David prayed for this love when he said, “Create a clean heart in me, O God!”<sup>3</sup> for cleanness of heart is nothing else but the love and grace of God. “The clean of heart,” are called blessed by our Savior, and it is as if He had said, blessed are those who love, for blessedness can come of nothing less than love.

2. The following words of Jeremiah, “From on high He hath cast a fire in my bones, and hath taught me,”<sup>4</sup> show plainly that the soul is purified when it is enlightened in the fire of loving wisdom, for God never grants the mystical wisdom without love; it being love itself that infuses it into the soul. David also says that the wisdom of God is silver tried in the purifying fire of love; “words of our Lord are chaste words, silver examined by fire,”<sup>5</sup> for the dim contemplation infuses into the soul love and wisdom, in everyone according to its necessity and capacity, enlightening the soul, and cleansing it of all its ignorances, according to the words of the Wise Man, “He hath enlightened my ignorances.”<sup>6</sup>

3. Here, also, we learn that the wisdom which purifies the ignorances of the angels (giving them knowledge, enlightening them on what they are ignorant of),<sup>7</sup> flowing from God through the highest, down to the lowest, in the order of the heavenly hierarchy, and thence to men, is that very wisdom which purifies these souls and enlightens them. All the works of the angels, and all the inspirations they suggest, are, therefore, in Holy Scripture, truly and properly said to be their work and God’s work. For, ordinarily, His inspirations come through the angels; they receiving them one from another instantaneously,<sup>8</sup> as the light of the sun penetrates many windows at once, arranged one behind the other. For though it is true that the light of the sun pierces all, yet each window conveys and pours that light into the next, somewhat modified, according to the nature of the glass; somewhat weaker and fainter, according to the distance from the sun.

4. Hence it follows, with respect to the higher and lower angels, the nearer they are to God the more they are purified and enlightened in the general purgation; the lowest in rank receiving their illumination in a less perfect degree. But man, being the last in order to whom this loving contemplation is to be granted,<sup>9</sup> must receive that enlightenment according to his capacity in a limited degree, and with suffering. For the light of God which illumines an angel enlightens him, and sets him on fire with love, for he is a spirit already prepared for the infusion of that light; but man, being impure and weak, is ordinarily enlightened, as I said before,<sup>10</sup> in darkness, in distress and pain—the sun’s rays are painful in their light to weak eyes—till the fire of love, purifying him, shall have spiritualized and refined him, so that being made pure he may be able to receive with sweetness, like the angels, the union of this inflowing love, as we shall explain, with the help of our Lord; but, in the meantime, this contemplation and loving knowledge come upon the soul through trials and loving anxiety, of which I am now speaking.

5. The soul is not always conscious of this burning and anxious love; for in the beginning of the spiritual purgation all the divine fire is employed in drying up and preparing the soul, rather than in setting it on fire. But when, in course of time,<sup>11</sup> the soul has become heated in the fire, it then feels most commonly this burning and warmth of love. And now, as the understanding is being purified more and more in this darkness, it happens occasionally that this mystical and affective theology, while inflaming the will, wounds also by enlightening the other faculty of the understanding with a certain divine light and knowledge, so sweetly and so divinely, that the will, aided by it though inactive,<sup>12</sup> glows in a marvelous manner, the



divine fire of love burning within it with living flames, so that the soul appears to have received a living fire with a living understanding. This is what David referred to when he said, “My heart waxed hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall burn,<sup>13</sup> so vehemently that I thought it to be already on fire.”

6. This kindling of love, in the union of these two powers, the understanding and the will, is to the soul a great treasure and delight, because it is a certain touch of the Godhead<sup>14</sup> and the foundation of the perfection of the union of love, for which the soul hopes. Thus the soul does not reach this sublime sense and love of God without passing through many tribulations, and accomplishing a great part of its purgation. But for other degrees of this union, lower than this, which are of ordinary occurrence, so intense a purgation is not required. From what we have said here it follows that these spiritual treasures, being passively infused into the soul by God, the will indeed may love and yet the understanding not understand, and likewise the understanding may be active while the will remains without love; for as the dark night of contemplation comprises both divine light and love, just as fire which has light and heat, it is not surprising that this loving light sometimes striking the will enkindles in it love, the understanding meanwhile remaining in darkness because the light has not fallen on it; at other times the light striking the understanding enlightens it and bestows knowledge on it while leaving the will dry, just as one might perceive the heat of fire without seeing its light, or the light without feeling any warmth, for it is the Lord who acts thus, infusing His gifts as He likes.<sup>15</sup>

*Other Sweet Effects Wrought in the Soul in the Dark Night of Contemplation*

*1. Illumination of the intellect. Pure spiritual affections of the will. 2. Thirst of love. 3. Appreciative love of God. 4. Strength of it. 5. St. Mary Magdalene. Love inebriates. 6. Love thinks all things possible. 7. Love impatient. 8. Conscious unworthiness reconciled with ardent aspiration. 9. Misery of the soul seen in the divine light. 10. Growth of sight. 11. Great mercy of God in restoring youth to the soul. 12. Intellect, will, and memory born anew. 13 & 14. Conclusion.*

BY THE expression “burning” we understand some of the sweet effects which are wrought in the soul by the dark night of contemplation;<sup>1</sup> for occasionally, amid the darkness, the soul receives light—“light shineth in darkness”<sup>2</sup>—the mystical inflowing streaming directly into the understanding, while the will remains dry, that is, not reaching to actual union,<sup>3</sup> but with a calmness and pureness so exquisite and so delicious to the soul as to be utterly indescribable: now God is felt to be present in one way, and again in another. Sometimes, too, it wounds the will at the same time, and enkindles love deeply, tenderly, and strongly; for, as I have said that sometimes these two faculties unite themselves,<sup>4</sup> the more the understanding is purified the more perfect and delicate, at times, is the union of the understanding and the will. But, before the soul attains to this state, it is more common for the touch of the fire of love to be felt in the will than for the touch of the perfect intelligence to be felt in the understanding.

Why, then, one might ask, if these two faculties are purified together, does one at the beginning generally feel the will to be inflamed with the love of purifying contemplation, rather than the mind with the understanding of it? The answer is, that here this passive love does not directly strike the will but the substance of the soul, thus moving the affections passively; for the will is a free faculty, whereas this burning love is a passion rather than a free act of the will. It is therefore called passion of love, and not a free act, because such an act is only in so far an act of the will as it is free. But as these passions and affections belong to the will it is correct to say that the will is subject to a passionate affection when the soul is subject to it, for in this manner the will is made captive, losing its liberty, being carried away by the impetuous force of the passion. In this sense one may say that this burning love is in the will, that is, it inflames the appetite of the will, and thus, as already stated, it is more properly called a passion of love than a free act of the will. On the other hand, the receptive passion of the understanding can only receive knowledge purely and passively—and this only when it has been purified—therefore previous to purgation the soul feels less frequently the touch of knowledge than the passion of love, for this latter does not require that the soul should be so thoroughly purified concerning its passions, since these precisely help it in feeling passionate love.<sup>5</sup>

2. This burning, and thirst of love, inasmuch as it now proceeds from the Holy Ghost, is very different from that of which I spoke in describing the night of sense.<sup>6</sup> For though sense also has now its part in this, because it cannot but share in the afflictions of the spirit, yet the root and living force of the thirst of love are felt in the higher part of the soul, that is, in the spirit. The spirit perceives and understands what it feels, and that it possesses not that which it longs for, so that it counts as nothing all the pain it feels, though it is beyond comparison greater than the pain of the first night, which is the night of sense; for it thoroughly understands that one great good is absent, and that there is no remedy possible.

3. It may be observed here that, although at first, in the beginning of the spiritual night, this burning love is not felt because the fire of love has not yet done its work, God communicates to the soul, instead of it, a reverent love of Himself so great that, as I have said,<sup>7</sup> the heaviest trials and deepest afflictions of this night are the distressing thought that it has lost God, and that He has abandoned it. It may, therefore, be always said that from the beginning of this night the soul is full of the anxieties of love, at one time that of reverence, at another that of burning. It is evident that the greatest of its sufferings is this doubt: for if it could be persuaded that all is not lost and over, and that the trials it undergoes are, as in truth they are, for its greater good, and that God is not angry, it would make no account whatsoever of all these afflictions; on the contrary, it would rejoice, knowing that by them it is serving God.

4. This reverential love of God is so strong in the soul though in the darkness and unaware of it—that it would be glad

not only to endure its trials but also to die a thousand deaths to serve Him. But when the fire of love and the reverent love of God together have set the soul in a flame, it is wont to gain such strength and energy, and such eager longing after God—effects of this glowing love—that it boldly disregards all considerations, and sets everything aside, in the inebriating force of love, and, without much consideration of its acts, it conducts itself strangely and extravagantly in every way that it may come to Him whom the soul loveth.

5. This is the reason why Mary Magdalene, though so noble, heeded not the many guests, high and low, who were feasting, as we read in St. Luke, in the house of the Pharisee.<sup>8</sup> She considered not that she was not welcome, and that tears were unseemly at the feast, provided she could, without an hour's delay, or waiting for another occasion, reach Him for whom her soul was wounded and on fire.<sup>9</sup> This is that inebriating and daring force of love, which, when she knew that her Love was in the sepulcher, guarded by soldiers lest the disciples should take Him away,<sup>10</sup> and a stone rolled over it and sealed, allowed none of these things to move her; for she went thither before dawn with the ointments to anoint her Beloved. And, finally, it was under the inebriating influence and anxieties of love that she asked Himself, Whom she took for the gardener, who, she thought, had robbed the sepulcher, to tell her, if he had taken Him away, where he had laid Him. "If thou hast carried Him away, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away."<sup>11</sup> She did not reflect upon the imprudence of her words; for it is clear that if the gardener had stolen the Body he would not have told her, still less would he have allowed her to take Him away.

6. This conduct of Mary Magdalene proceeded from the vehemence and energy of her love; for love thinks all things possible, and that all are of the same mind with itself; for it cannot believe that there is anything to occupy men, or anything to be sought for by them, except that which itself seeks and loves; it considers that there can be no other occupation or desire except its own, and that every one should busy himself in this.<sup>12</sup> Thus, when the bride went out into the streets and highways seeking her beloved, she, believing that all were employed, like herself, in searching for him, adjured them, if they found him, to tell him that she languished with love.<sup>13</sup>

7. So strong was Mary's love that she intended, if the gardener had told her where he had hidden our Lord, to go and take Him away, in spite of any prohibition. Of this kind are those anxieties of love which the soul feels when it has made some progress in the spiritual purgation. The soul rises by night—that is, in the purifying darkness—in the affections of the will. As a lioness or a bear, robbed of its whelps, whom it cannot find, seeks them anxiously and earnestly, so does the wounded soul seek after God. Being in darkness, it feels His absence, and is dying of love. This is that impatient love which no man can endure long without obtaining his wishes or dying. It is like Rachel's longing for children, when she says to Jacob, "Give me children, otherwise I shall die."<sup>14</sup>

8. We have now to consider how it is that the soul, conscious of its own misery and unworthiness before God, can be so bold, amid the purifying darkness, as to aspire after union with Him. The reason is, that love gives it strength to love in earnest, it being the nature of love to seek for union, companionship, equality with, and likeness to the object beloved, so as to attain to the perfection of itself. Hence it is that the soul not yet made perfect in love, because it has not attained to union, hungers and thirsts for that which it has not—namely, union; and the strength which love communicates to the will, which is on fire, renders it bold and daring as to the will, though as to the understanding, because that is in darkness, it feels itself to be an unworthy and miserable object.

9. I must not omit here to say why it is that the divine light, being always light to the soul, does not illumine it the moment it strikes it, as it does at a later time, instead of bringing with it the darkness and misery of which I am speaking.<sup>15</sup> Something has been already said, but I now speak of it directly. The darkness and other miseries of which the soul is conscious proceed not from the divine light when it strikes the soul, but from the soul itself, and it is the light which enables it to see them. The divine light gives light at once, but the soul sees nothing at first but that which is immediately before it, or rather within itself; its own darkness and misery, which, by the mercy of God, it sees now, and formerly saw not, because this supernatural light had not been granted it.

10. This is the reason why, in the beginning, the soul is conscious of nothing but of darkness and misery. But when it has been purified by the knowledge and sense of its misery it will have eyes to discern the blessings of the divine light, and being delivered and set free from all darkness and imperfections, the great blessings and profit will become known which the soul is gaining for itself in this blessed night.

11. This shows how great is the mercy of God to the soul when He thus purifies it in this strong lye and bitter purgation, as to its sensual and spiritual part, from all its affections and imperfect habits in all that relates to time, nature, sense, and spirit; by darkening its interior faculties, and emptying them of all objects, by correcting and drying up all affections of sense and spirit, by weakening and wasting the natural forces, which the soul never could have done of itself, as we shall immediately show. God makes it die, in this way, to all that is not God, that, being denuded and stripped of its former clothing, it may clothe itself anew. Thus the soul's "youth shall be renewed like the eagle's,"<sup>16</sup> clothed with "the new man," which, in the words of the Apostle, is "created according to God in justice."<sup>17</sup>

12. Now this is nothing else but the supernatural light giving light to the understanding, so that the human understanding becomes divine, made one with the divine. In the same way divine love inflames the will so that it becomes nothing less than

divine, loving in a divine way, united and made one with the divine will and divine love. The memory is affected in like manner; all the desires and affections also are changed divinely according to God. Thus the soul will be of heaven, heavenly, divine rather than human.

13. All this, as is clear from what I have said, is the work of God in the soul during this night, enlightening it and setting it on fire in a divine way with an anxious solicitude for God alone, and for naught besides.

14. It is with great propriety and justice, therefore, that the soul repeats the third line of the stanza, which, together with those that follow, I repeat again and explain in the following chapter.

*Repeats and Explains the Last  
Three Lines of the First Stanza*

*1. The soul leaves the house of self-indulgence. 2. The passions subdued, the soul goes forth to God. 3. Happiness of such a soul.*

*O happy lot!  
Forth unobserved I went,  
My house being now at rest.*

THE happy lot of which the soul is singing in the first of these three lines befell it through those means of which it speaks in the two lines that follow it; making use of a metaphor, it describes itself as one who, for the better execution of his purpose, goes out of his house by night, in the dark, the inmates of which are at rest, in order that none might hinder him. The soul having to perform so heroic and so rare an act, that of being united to the divine Beloved, sallies forth, because the Beloved is to be found only without, in solitude. The bride therefore desired to find Him alone, saying: “Who shall give Thee to me for my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother, that I may find Thee without and kiss Thee?”<sup>1</sup> It is necessary for the enamored soul, in order to obtain the end desired, to act in the same way; to go out by night when all the inmates of its house repose and sleep; that is, when its lower operations, passions, and desires are at rest and asleep in this night. These are the inmates of its house which when awake ever hinder its good, enemies of its freedom. These are they of whom our Savior says in the holy gospel, “A man’s enemies shall be they of his own household!”<sup>2</sup>

2. Thus it is necessary that their operations and motions should be lulled to sleep in this night in order that they may be no hindrance to the supernatural blessings of union with God in love, for which they continue to energize and act, that is unattainable. All movement and action on their part, instead of helping, hinder the reception of the spiritual blessings of the union of love, because all natural exertion is defective with regard to those supernatural blessings which God alone secretly and silently infuses into the passive soul. Hence it is necessary that the powers of the soul should be at rest, keeping passive,<sup>3</sup> if it is to receive what God infuses, and should not interfere with their own inferior actions and base inclinations.

3. It was a happy lot for the soul when God in this night put all its household to sleep, that is, all the powers, passions, affections, and desires of the sensual and spiritual soul, that it may attain to the spiritual union of the perfect love of God “unobserved,” that is, unhindered by these affections—now lulled and mortified in the dark of this night that they may notice or feel naught according to their mean nature whereby to prevent the soul from going forth from self and the habitation of sensuality.<sup>4</sup> O how happy must the soul then be, when it can escape from the house of its sensuality! None can understand it, I think, except that soul which has experienced it. That soul clearly sees how wretched was its former slavery, and how great its misery when it lay at the mercy of its passions and desires; it learns now that the life of the spirit is true liberty and riches, with innumerable blessings in its train, some of which I shall speak of while explaining the following stanzas, when it will more clearly appear what good reasons the soul has for describing the passage of this awful night as a happy lot.

*The Second Stanza and Its Explanation**Answer to an Objection*

*In darkness and in safety,  
By the secret ladder, disguised,  
O happy lot!  
In darkness and concealment,  
My house being now at rest.*

IN THIS stanza the soul goes on singing still of certain properties of the darkness of this night, speaking again of the happy lot which befell it through them. It speaks of them in answering an implied objection, observing that no one is to think that because in this dark night it passed through so many storms of affliction, doubt, fear, and horror, as I said before,<sup>1</sup> it had therefore run any risk of being lost; yea, rather, it found safety in the darkness, because in the darkness it was free and skillfully escaped from its enemies who were ever hindering its departure.

2. In the darkness of the night it changed its garments and disguised itself in three colors, of which I shall speak hereafter.<sup>2</sup> It sallied forth unknown to the whole of its household by a most secret ladder, which, as I shall show in the proper place, is a living faith—in such secrecy and silence, for the better execution of its purpose, that it could not possibly be in greater security; especially now, because in the purgative night the desires, passions, and affections of the soul are asleep, mortified, and subdued; and these are they which, awake and active, would never have consented to that departure.

*Shows How the Soul Journeys Securely When in Darkness*

*1. Means of the safe journey in the spiritual night. 2. Security found in self-mortification. 3. Man destroys, God saves. 4. Gains. 5. Why are the natural faculties obscured? 6. Because in themselves incapable of perfect union with God. 7. Natural taste and facility not spiritual fervor. 8. The soul delivered from itself and prepared for God. 9. Four reasons why the dark road is safe: God is the guide. 10. Suffering gives strength. 11. The way enlightened by divine wisdom. 12. The soul guarded by the obscurity of divine contemplation. 13. Texts. 14. One of the miseries of this life is the difficulty in knowing truth. 15. God the tabernacle of protection. 16. Fourth reason: courage and vigilance acquired at the outset.*

*In Darkness and in Safety*

THE darkness of which the soul here speaks relates, as I have said,<sup>1</sup> to the desires and powers of sense, interior and spiritual, all of which are deprived of their natural light in this night, that, being purified as to this, they may be supernaturally enlightened. The desires of sense and spirit are lulled to sleep and mortified, unable to relish anything either human or divine; the affections of the soul are thwarted and brought low, become helpless, and have nothing to rest upon; the imagination is fettered, and unable to make any profitable reflections, the memory is gone, and the will, too, is dry and afflicted, and all the faculties are empty and useless,<sup>2</sup> and, moreover, a dense and heavy cloud overshadows the soul, distresses it and holds it as if it were far away from God. This is the darkness in which the soul says that it travels in safety.

2. The reason of this safety has been clearly shown: for usually the soul never errs, except under the influence of its desires, or tastes, or reflections, or understanding, or affections, wherein it generally is overabundant, or defective, changeable, or inconsistent; hence the inclination to that which is not becoming. It is therefore clear that the soul is secure against being led astray by them, when all these operations and movements have ceased. Because then the soul is delivered, not only from itself, but also from its other enemies—the world and the devil—who, when the affections and operations of the soul have ceased, cannot assault it by any other way or by any other means.

3. It follows from this, that the greater the darkness and emptiness of its natural operations in which the soul travels, the greater is its security. For as the prophet says, “Perdition is thine own, O Israel; only in Me is thy help.”<sup>3</sup> The perdition of the soul is exclusively its own work—the result of its own operations, of its unsubdued desires, interior and sensual—and its salvation, says God, come from Me only. When the soul is hindered from giving way to its imperfections there descend upon it forthwith the blessings of union with God, in its desires and faculties which that union will render heavenly and divine.

4. If, therefore, while this darkness lasts, the soul will look within, it will very clearly see how slightly the desires and the faculties have been diverted towards vain and unprofitable matters, and that it is secure itself against vainglory, pride, and presumption, empty rejoicing, and many other evils. It is quite clear, therefore, that the soul which is in this darkness is not only not lost, but that it gains much, for now it acquires virtue.

5. But here a question arises: Why is it—seeing that the things of God are profitable and beneficial to the soul, and a source of security—that the desires and faculties are so darkened by Him in this night that they cannot have any joy in spiritual things or occupy themselves with them as with other things, but are, in some way, less able to do so? To this I reply, that it is then profitable<sup>4</sup> for the soul not to act and be devoid of pleasure even in spiritual things, seeing that its faculties and desires are base and impure and altogether natural;<sup>5</sup> and even if they have pleasure in, and are familiar with, divine and supernatural things, that can be so only in their naturally<sup>6</sup> mean way.

6. It is a philosophical axiom that all that is received is received according to the condition of the recipient. From this it follows that the natural faculties—being without the requisite purity, strength, and capacity for the reception and fruition of divine things in their way, which is divine, but only in their own, which is human and vile<sup>7</sup>—must be in darkness with regard to the divine way, so as to secure their perfect purgation. That being weaned, purified, and brought to nothing, they may lose



their own mode of acting and receiving, and may be thus disposed and tempered for the reception and fruition of that which is divine in a high and noble way; which cannot be if the old man do not die first. Hence it is that all spiritual graces if they do not descend from the Father of lights upon the human will and desire, however much a man may exercise his taste, desire, and faculties about God, and however much he may seem to succeed, are still not divinely nor spiritually enjoyed, but humanly and naturally like all other things, for these are not goods flowing from man to God, but coming to man from God.<sup>8</sup>

7. As to this I might here show, were this the proper place, that there are many whose tastes and affections, and the operations of whose faculties, are directed to God and to spiritual things, who may imagine all this to be supernatural and spiritual, when in reality it is nothing more, perhaps, than acts and desires most natural and human. As they regard ordinary matters, so also do they regard good things, with a certain natural facility which they have in directing their faculties and desires to anything, whatever it may be. If I can find an opportunity in the course of this discussion, I propose to enter upon this question,<sup>9</sup> and describe some of the signs by which we may know when the motives and interior acts of the soul in the things of God are natural only, when they are spiritual only, and when they are natural and spiritual together. It is enough for us here to know that the interior acts and movements of the soul, if they are to be divinely influenced by God, must be first of all lulled to sleep, darkened and subdued, in their natural state, so far as their capacity and operations are concerned, until they lose all their strength.

8. O spiritual soul, when thou seest thy desire obscured, thy will arid and constrained, and thy faculties incapable of any interior act, be not grieved at this, but look upon it rather as a great good, for God is delivering thee from thyself, taking the matter out of thy hands; for however strenuously thou mayest exert thyself, thou wilt never do anything so faultlessly, perfectly, and securely as now—because of the impurity and torpor of thy faculties—when God, taking thee by the hand, is guiding thee in the dark as one that is blind, along a road and to an end thou knowest not, and whither thou couldst never travel by the help of thine own eyes and thine own feet, however strong thou mayest be.

9. The reason why the soul not only travels securely when it thus travels in the dark, but makes even greater progress, is this: In general the soul makes greater progress when it least thinks so, yea, most frequently when it imagines that it is losing. Having never before experienced the present novelty which dazzles it, and disturbs its former habits, it considers itself as losing, rather than as gaining ground, when it sees itself lost in a place it once knew, and in which it delighted, traveling by a road it knows not, and in which it has no pleasure. As a traveler into strange countries goes by ways strange and untried, relying on information derived from others, and not upon any knowledge of his own—it is clear that he will never reach a new country but by new ways which he knows not, and by abandoning those he knew—so in the same way the soul makes the greater progress when it travels in the dark, not knowing the way. But inasmuch as God Himself is here the guide of the soul in its blindness, the soul may well exult and say, “In darkness and in safety,” now that it has come to a knowledge of its state.

10. There is another reason also why the soul has traveled safely in this obscurity; it has suffered: for the way of suffering is safer, and also more profitable, than that of rejoicing and of action. In suffering God gives strength, but in action and in joy the soul does but show its own weakness and imperfections. And in suffering, the soul practices and acquires virtue, and becomes pure, wiser, and more cautious.

11. There is another and stronger reason why the soul travels securely when in darkness. This reason is derived from the consideration of the light itself, or dark wisdom. The dark night of contemplation so absorbs the soul, and brings it so near unto God, that He defends it, and delivers it from all that is not God. For the soul is now, as it were, under medical treatment for the recovery of its health, which is God Himself: God compels it to observe a particular diet, and to abstain from all hurtful things, the very desire for them being subdued. The soul is treated like a sick man respected by his household, who is so carefully tended that the air shall not touch him, nor the light shine upon him, whom the noise of footsteps and the tumult of servants shall not disturb, and to whom the most delicate food is given most cautiously by measure, and that nutritious rather than savory.

12. All these advantages—they all minister to the safekeeping of the soul—are the effects of this dim contemplation, for it brings the soul nearer to God. The truth is, that the nearer the soul comes to Him it perceives that darkness is greater and deeper because of its own weakness; thus the nearer the sun the greater the darkness and distress wrought by its great brightness, because our eyes are weak, imperfect, and defective. Hence it is that the spiritual light of God is so immeasurable, so far above the understanding, that when it comes near to it, it dims and blinds it.

13. This is the reason why David says that God made darkness His hiding-place and covert, His tabernacle around Him, dark water in the clouds of the air.<sup>10</sup> The dark water in the clouds of the air is the dim contemplation and divine wisdom in souls, as I am going to explain, of which they have experience as a thing near to the pavilion where He dwells, when God brings them nearer to Himself. Thus, that which in God is light and supreme splendor, is to man thick darkness, as St. Paul says,<sup>11</sup> and as the royal prophet David explains it in the same psalm, saying: “Because of the brightness of His presence the clouds passed,”<sup>12</sup> that is, clouds and darkness over the natural understanding, “the light of which” says the prophet Isaiah, “is darkened in the mist thereof.”<sup>13</sup>

14. O wretched condition of this life wherein it is so dangerous to live and so difficult to find the truth!<sup>14</sup> That which is



most clear and true, is to us most obscure and doubtful, and we therefore avoid it though it is most necessary for us. That which shines the most, and dazzles our eyes, that we embrace and follow after, though it is most hurtful to us, and makes us stumble at every step. In what fear and danger then must man be living, seeing that the very light of his natural eyes, by which he directs his steps, is the very first to bewilder and deceive him when he would draw near unto God. If he wishes to be sure of the road he travels on, he must close his eyes and walk in the dark, if he is to journey in safety from his domestic foes, which are his own senses and faculties.

15. Well hidden and protected then is the soul in the dark waters close to God. For as the dark waters are a tabernacle and dwelling-place for God Himself, so they are also to the soul perfect safety and protection, though in darkness, where it is hidden and protected from itself, as I have said,<sup>15</sup> and from all the injuries that created things may afflict. It is of souls thus protected that David spoke when he said in another psalm: “Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy face, from the disturbance of men. Thou shalt protect them in Thy tabernacle from the contradiction of tongues.”<sup>16</sup> These words comprehend all kinds of protection; for to be hidden “in the secret of the face” of God “from the disturbance of men,” is to be strengthened in the dim contemplation against all the assaults of men. To be protected in His “tabernacle from the contradiction of tongues” is to be engulfed in the dark waters, which is the tabernacle of which David speaks. That soul, therefore, whose desires and affections are weaned, and whose faculties are in darkness, is set free from all the imperfections which war against the spirit, whether they proceed from the flesh, or from any other created thing. The soul, therefore, may well say, “In darkness and in safety.”

16. Another reason, not less conclusive, why the soul, though in darkness, travels securely, is derived from that courage which it acquires as soon as it enters within the dark, painful, and gloomy waters of God. Though it be dark, still it is water, and therefore cannot but refresh and strengthen the soul in all that is most necessary for it, though it does so painfully and in darkness. For the soul immediately discerns in itself a certain courage and resolution to do nothing which it knows to be displeasing unto God, and to leave nothing undone which ministers to His service, because this love, which is dim, is most watchful and careful of what it is to do, and what it is to leave undone, for His sake, so as to please Him. It looks around and considers in a thousand ways whether it has done anything to offend Him, and all this with much more solicitude and carefulness than it ever did before, as I said when speaking of this anxious love.<sup>17</sup> Here all the desires, all the strength, and all the powers of the soul, recollected from all besides, direct all their efforts and all their energies to the service of God only. Thus the soul goes forth out of itself, away from all created things, to the sweet and delightful union of the love of God, “in darkness and in safety.”

*Gives the Second Line and Explains How This Dim Contemplation Is Secret*

*1. Three points of explanation: secret, ladder, disguised. 2. Secret. 3. Continuation. 4. Nature of divine language. 5. Jeremiah and Moses. 6. Difficulties of contemplation with their directors. 7. The soul hidden in the abyss of wisdom. 8. Continuation. 9. It leads the soul to union with a hidden God. 10. Contemplation an infusion of the secret wisdom of God.*

*By the Secret Ladder, Disguised*

I HAVE three things to explain in reference to the three words of this line. Two of them—“secret” and “ladder”—belong to the dark night of contemplation of which I am speaking, but the third—“disguised”—belongs to the way of the soul therein. As to the first, the soul calls the dim contemplation, by which it goes forth to the union of love, a secret ladder, and that because of two properties of it which I am going to explain, namely, that it is secret, and that it is a ladder.<sup>1</sup> First, this dark contemplation is called secret, because it is, as I have said before,<sup>2</sup> the mystical theology which theologians call secret wisdom, and which, according to St. Thomas,<sup>3</sup> is infused into the soul more especially by love. This happens in a secret hidden way in which the natural operations of the understanding and the other faculties have no share. And, therefore, because the faculties of the soul cannot compass it, it being the Holy Ghost Who infuses it into the soul, in a way it knoweth not, as the bride says in the Canticle,<sup>4</sup> we call it secret.

2. And, in truth, it is not the soul only that knows it not, but every one else, even the devil; because the Master who now teaches the soul dwells substantially within it, whither Satan cannot penetrate, neither the natural senses nor the understanding.<sup>5</sup> This is not the only reason why it is called secret, for it is secret also in its effects. It is not only secret beyond the powers of the soul to speak of it, during the darkness and sharpness of the purgation, when the secret wisdom is purifying the soul, but afterwards also, during the illumination, when that wisdom is most clearly communicated, it is so secret that it cannot be discerned or described. Moreover, the soul has no wish to speak of it, and besides, it can discover no way or proper similitude to describe it by, so as to make known a knowledge so high, a spiritual impression so delicate and infused. Yea, and if it could have a wish to speak of it, and find terms to describe it, it would always remain secret still.

3. Because this interior wisdom is so simple, general, and spiritual, that it enters not into the understanding under any form or image subject to sense, as is sometimes the case, the imagination, therefore, and the senses—as it has not entered in by them, nor is modified by them—cannot account for it, nor form any conception of it, so as to speak in any degree correctly about it, though the soul be distinctly conscious that it feels and tastes this sweet and strange wisdom. The soul is like a man who sees an object for the first time, the like of which he has never seen before; he handles it and feels it, yet he cannot say what it is, or tell its name, do what he may, though it be at the same time an object cognizable by the senses. How much less then can that be described which does not enter in by the senses?

4. Such is the nature of the divine language that the more interior, infused, and spiritual it is, the more it transcends every sense; the powers of the senses, interior and exterior, cease, and their harmonies become mute.

5. The Holy Writings supply both proofs and illustrations of this principle. Jeremiah shows the impossibility of manifesting and expressing it in words: for when God had spoken to him he knew not what to say, except, “Ah, ah, ah, Lord God.”<sup>6</sup> Moses, also, is an instance of the interior helplessness, that is, of the interior imaginative sense, and of the exterior also at the same time: for when God spoke to him out of the bush, he not only saw that he could not speak, but, as is said in the Acts of the Apostles,<sup>7</sup> he “durst not behold,”<sup>8</sup> that is, with the interior imagination, which he considered far removed and powerless not only to form some picture of what he saw in God, but not even capable of receiving an impression thereof. Hence, inasmuch as the wisdom of this contemplation is the language of God addressed to the soul, as of a pure Spirit speaking to

another pure spirit, nothing inferior to a spirit, such as the senses, is able to perceive it; it remains, therefore, a secret to them which they neither know nor can express, nor do they wish to know it because they do not even see it.<sup>9</sup>

6. This explains why some persons, walking in this way, good and timid souls, who, when they would give an account of their interior state to their directors, know not how to do it, neither have they the power to do it, and so feel a great repugnance to explain themselves, especially when contemplation is the more simple and with difficulty discernible by them. All they can say is that their soul is satisfied, calm, or contented, that they have a sense of the presence of God, and that all goes well with them, as they think; but they cannot explain their state, except by general expressions of this kind. But it is a different matter when they have a consciousness of particular things, such as visions, impressions, and the like; these in general are communicated under some species, in which the senses participate; in that case they are able to describe them. But it is not in the nature of pure contemplation that it can be described; for it can scarcely be spoken of in words, and therefore we call it secret.

7. This is not the only reason why it is called secret, and why it is so. There is another, namely the mystical wisdom has the property of hiding the soul within itself. For beside its ordinary operation, it sometimes so absorbs the soul and plunges it in this secret abyss that the soul sees itself distinctly as far away from, and abandoned by, all created things; it looks upon itself as one that is placed in a wild and vast solitude whither no human being can come, as in an immense wilderness without limits; a wilderness, the more delicious, sweet, and lovely, the more it is wide, vast, and lonely, where the soul is the more hidden, the more it is raised up above all created things.

8. This abyss of wisdom now so exalts and elevates the soul—orderly disposing it for the science of love—that it makes it not only understand how mean are all created things in relation to the supreme wisdom and divine knowledge, but also, how low, defective, and, in a certain sense, improper, are all the words and phrases by which in this life we discuss divine things, and how utterly impossible by any natural means, however profoundly and learnedly we may speak, to understand and see them as they are, except in the light of mystical theology. And so the soul in the light thereof discerning this truth, namely, that it cannot reach it, and still less explain it by the terms of ordinary speech, justly calls it secret.

9. This property of being secret, and of surpassing all natural capacity, belongs to divine contemplation, not only because it is itself supernatural, but also because it is the guide of the soul to the perfections of union with God, which not being humanly known, we must reach by not knowing the way humanly,<sup>10</sup> and being divinely ignorant. For, to use the language of mystical theology, as we are doing, these divine perfections<sup>11</sup> are neither understood nor known when they are sought, but when they are found and practiced. For thus the prophet Baruch speaks of the divine wisdom: “There is none that can know her ways, nor that can search out her paths.”<sup>12</sup> The royal prophet also, speaking of this way of the soul, says unto God: “Thy lightnings enlightened the round world, the earth was moved and trembled, Thy way is in the sea, and Thy paths in many waters, and Thy steps shall not be known.”<sup>13</sup> All this in a spiritual sense explains the matter I am discussing.

10. The lightnings that enlightened the round world is the illumination of the faculties of the soul in the divine contemplation, the moving and trembling of the earth is the painful purgation of which it is the cause. To say that the way of God, by which the soul draws near unto Him, is in the sea, and His paths in many waters, and therefore not known, is to say that this way to God is as secret, and as hidden from the senses of the soul, as the way of one who walks on the waters is from the senses of the body, and whose paths and steps are not known. The paths and steps of God in those souls which He is drawing to Himself, making them great in the union of His wisdom, have this property, that they are not known. That is the meaning of these words in the book of Job, impressing upon us this truth, “Knowest thou the great paths of the clouds, and perfect knowledges?”<sup>14</sup> that is, the paths and ways of God, in which He makes souls great and perfect in His wisdom; these are the clouds. This contemplation, therefore, which guides the soul to God is secret wisdom.

*Shows How This Secret Wisdom Is Also a Ladder*

*1. The ladder by which to ascend to God. 2. And to descend to self by humility. 3. Vicissitudes of the spiritual life. 4. The ladder of Jacob's dream. 5. Science of love.*

IT REMAINS for me to explain the second property, namely, how this secret wisdom is also a ladder. There are many reasons for calling secret contemplation a ladder. In the first place, as men employ ladders to mount up to those strong places where treasures are laid up, so also by secret contemplation, without knowing how, the soul ascends, and mounts upwards, to the knowledge and possession of the goods and treasures of heaven. This is well expressed by the royal prophet David when he says, “Blessed is the man whose help is from Thee: he hath disposed ascensions in his heart, in the vale of tears, in the place which he hath appointed. For the Lawgiver shall give blessing; they shall go from virtue into virtue: the God of gods shall be seen in Zion.”<sup>1</sup> He is the treasure of the citadel of Zion which is blessedness.

2. We may also call it a ladder, for as the steps of one and the same ladder serve to descend as well as to ascend by, so, too, those very communications which the soul receives in secret contemplation raise it up to God and make it humble. For the communications which really come from God have this property: they humble and exalt the soul at one and the same time. In the spiritual way, to descend is to ascend, and to ascend is to descend, “because every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, as the virtue of humility is an exaltation, for the trial of the soul therein, God is wont to make it ascend by this ladder that it may descend, and make it descend that it may ascend; for thus are fulfilled the words of the Wise Man, “Before he be broken the heart of a man is exalted, and before he be glorified it is humbled.”<sup>3</sup>

3. If the soul will reflect on this from the natural point of view<sup>4</sup>—I omit the spiritual which is not perceptible—it will easily see how uneven is the road; how after prosperity, which makes it glad, storms and trials follow at once, so that its previous repose seems to have been given it to prepare it and strengthen it for its present sufferings; how also, after misery and distress, come abundance and ease, so that the soul shall seem to have kept a vigil before the feast. This is the ordinary course of the state of contemplation, for until the soul attains to repose it never continues in one state; for all is ascending and descending. The reason is this; the state of perfection, which consists in the perfect love of God and contempt of self, can only subsist on two conditions, the knowledge of God and of oneself. The soul, therefore, must of necessity be tried in the one and the other, in the first which exalts it, by giving it to taste the sweetness of God, in the second which, by trials, humbles it, until, perfect habits having been acquired, it ceases to ascend and descend, having arrived at the summit, united with God, Who is at the top of it, and on Whom, too, the ladder rests.

4. The ladder of contemplation, which, as I have said, comes down from God, is shadowed forth by that ladder which Jacob saw in a dream, and the angels ascending and descending by it, from God to man and from man to God, Who was Himself leaning upon it.<sup>5</sup> This took place by night, when Jacob slept, as the Scriptures declare, that we may learn from it how secret is the way and ascent unto God, and how different from all human conception. This is plain enough, for, in general, that which is to our greater profit—the loss and annihilation of self—we esteem a calamity; and that which is of but little value—comfort and sweetness, where, in general, we lose instead of gaining—we look upon as the more advantageous for us.

5. But, to speak with more accuracy, and to the purpose, of the ladder of secret contemplation, I must observe that the chief reason why it is called a ladder is, that contemplation is the science of love, which is an infused loving knowledge of God, and which enlightens the soul and at the same time kindles within it the fire of love till it shall ascend upwards step by step unto God its Creator; for it is love only that unites the soul and God. With a view to the greater clearness of this matter, I shall mark the steps of this divine ladder, explaining concisely the signs and effects of each, that the soul may be able to form some conjecture on which of them it stands. I shall distinguish between them by their effects with St. Bernard and St. Thomas,<sup>6</sup>

and because it is not naturally possible to know them as they are in themselves, because the ladder of love is so secret that it can be weighed and measured by God only.

*Begins the Explanation of the Ten Degrees of the Mystic Ladder According to St. Bernard and St. Thomas*

*1. First step: the languishing of love. 2. The sick man. 3. Second step: the search for God. 4. Third step: good works. 5. Charity is not puffed up. 6. Fourth step: suffering without weariness. 7. The spirit regardless of the flesh. 8. Disinterested love. 9. Text. 10. Fifth step: the soul pants after God.*

THE steps of the ladder of love, by which the soul, ascending from one to another, rises upwards to God, we say are ten. The first degree of love makes the soul languish to its great profit. On this the bride is speaking when she says, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my beloved, that you tell him that I languish with love.”<sup>1</sup> This languishing is not unto death, but to the glory of God; for the soul here<sup>2</sup> faints away as to sin and all things whatsoever that are not God, for God’s sake, as the Psalmist testifies, saying: “My spirit hath fainted away”<sup>3</sup> from all things after Thy salvation; as he says in another place: “My soul hath fainted after Thy salvation.”<sup>4</sup>

2. As a sick man loses the desire for, and the taste of, all food, and the color vanishes from his face, so the soul in this degree of love loses all pleasure in earthly things, and all desire of them, and, like one in love, changes its color, that is, the conditions of the past life.<sup>5</sup> The soul does not fall into this languishing state if the vehement heat descends not into it from above, which is the mystic fever, according to the words of the Psalmist, “Voluntary rain shalt Thou separate, O God, to thine inheritance, and it was weakened, but Thou hast perfected it.”<sup>6</sup> This languishing and fainting away as to all things—it is the first and earliest step to God—I have already explained,<sup>7</sup> when I spoke of that annihilation to which the soul is brought when it begins to stand upon the ladder of contemplative purgation, when it finds no comfort, pleasure, nor support anywhere. In consequence of which it begins immediately to climb the second step<sup>8</sup> of the ladder.

3. On the second step the soul is unremitting in its search after God. Thus the bride speaks of her seeking Him in her bed by night—she had fainted away when on the first step of the ladder—and not having found Him, says: “I will rise; I will seek Him whom my soul loveth.”<sup>9</sup> This is now the unceasing occupation of the soul. “Seek ye the Lord, seek His face evermore,”<sup>10</sup> is the counsel of the Psalmist, and never rest until He be found; like the bride who, when she had questioned the watchmen, passed on in her search,<sup>11</sup> and left them. Mary Magdalene did not remain even with the angels at the sepulcher.<sup>12</sup> So anxious is the soul now that it seeks the Beloved in all things; all its thoughts, words, and works are referred to Him; in eating, sleeping, and waking, all its anxieties are about Him, as I have already described it when speaking of the anxieties of love.<sup>13</sup> As love becomes strong, regaining health, it commences the ascent to the third step by a new purgation in the night—as I shall hereafter explain<sup>14</sup>—and which issues in the effects that follow.

4. The third step of the ladder of love renders the soul active and fervent, so that it faints not. Of this step the royal prophet says, “Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord, he shall delight exceedingly in His commandments.”<sup>15</sup> If then fear, being the fruit of love, produces this delight, what will be the effect of love itself? On this step the soul looks on great things as little, on many as few, its long service as short, by reason of the fire of love which is burning. It is with the soul as it was with Jacob, who “served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed but a few days, because of the greatness of his love.”<sup>16</sup> If the love of a created being did so much in Jacob, what will the love of the Creator Himself do, when it shall have taken possession of the soul on the third step of the ladder?

5. Here the soul, because of the great love it has for God, is in great pain and suffering because of the scantiness of its service; if it could lawfully die for Him a thousand times it would be comforted. It looks upon itself therefore as unprofitable in all it does, and on its life as worthless. Another most wonderful effect is that it looks upon itself as being in truth the very worst of all, because its love continues to show it what is due to God; and then, because as it labors much in the service of God and sees how faulty and imperfect are its works, it is ashamed and distressed, seeing that the service it renders to God, Who is so high, is so exceedingly mean. On this third step the soul is very far from giving way to vainglory or presumption, or from

condemning others. These anxious effects and others of the same kind are wrought in the soul when on the third step of the ladder, and so the soul acquires strength and courage to ascend to the fourth.

6. When the soul is on the fourth step of the ladder of love, it falls into a state of suffering, but without weariness, on account of the Beloved; for, as St. Augustine says, love makes all that is grievous and heavy to be light as nothing.<sup>17</sup> It was on this step that the bride stood when, longing for the last, she said: “Put me as a seal upon Thy heart, as a seal upon Thy arm; for love”—that is, the acts and operations of love—“is strong as death; jealousy is hard as hell.”<sup>18</sup>

7. The spirit is now so strong, and has so subdued the flesh, and makes so little of it, that it is as regardless of it as a tree of one of its leaves. It seeks not for consolation or sweetness either in God or elsewhere, neither does it pray for God’s gifts, seeing clearly how many it has already received.<sup>19</sup> For all it cares for now is how it shall please God, and serve Him in some measure in return for His goodness, and for the graces it has received, and this at any and every cost.

8. It is now saying with heart and mind, my God and my Lord, how many there are who seek their own comfort and joy in Thee and who pray for gifts and graces, but those who strive to please Thee, who offer Thee that which costs them something, and who cast their own interests aside, are very few; it is not Thy will to show mercy that fails, O my God! but it is we who fail in using Thy mercies in Thy service, so as to bind Thee to show us Thy mercy continually.

9. This degree of love is exceedingly high, for now as the soul, earnest in its love, always follows after God in the spirit of suffering for His sake, God frequently and, as it were, continually gives it joy, visiting it sweetly in spirit, for the boundless love of Christ, the Word, cannot look on the sufferings of the souls that love without coming to their relief. He has promised this by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah, saying, “I have remembered thee, pitying thy youth. . . . When thou followed Me in the desert,”<sup>20</sup> which in its spiritual sense is that detachment of the soul from all created things, not resting upon them nor at ease among them. On this fourth step of the ladder the soul is so inflamed with love, and so set on fire with the desire after God, that it ascends upwards to the fifth, which is the next.

10. On the fifth step of the ladder the soul longs after God, and desires Him with impatience. So great is the eagerness of the soul on this step to embrace, and be united to, the Beloved, that all delay, howsoever slight, seems to it long, tedious, and oppressive, and it is ever thinking that it has found its love; but when it sees that its desires are disappointed—which is almost continually the case—it faints away through its longing, as the Psalmist says, speaking of this step: “My soul longeth and fainteth for the courts of our Lord.”<sup>21</sup> On this step the soul must either obtain its desires or die, as Rachel, because of her great longing for children, says to Jacob, her husband, “Give me children, otherwise I shall die.”<sup>22</sup> “They suffer hunger like dogs and go round about the city.”<sup>23</sup> In this degree of hunger<sup>24</sup> the soul is now nourished by love, for as was its hunger so is its abundance, and so it ascends to the sixth step, the effects of which are as follows.



*Of the Other Five Degrees*

*1. Sixth step: running in the way of God's commandments. 2. Seventh step: holy boldness in prayer. 3. Humility essential to every step of the ladder. 4. Eighth step: the possession of God. 5. Ninth step, the sweet fire of divine love. 6. Tenth step: the beatific vision. 7. Love reveals all secrets.*

WHEN the soul has ascended to the sixth step, it runs swiftly to God from Whom it receives many touches;<sup>1</sup> and hope too runs without fainting, for love that has made it strong makes it fly rapidly. Of this step also Isaiah speaks, saying: "They that hope in our Lord shall change their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not labor, they shall walk and not faint."<sup>2</sup> To this step also the Psalmist refers: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul panteth after Thee, O God."<sup>3</sup> The hart when thirsty runs very swiftly to the water. The cause of this swiftness which the soul experiences on this step is that charity is enlarged, and the soul is now almost wholly purified, as it is written in the psalm: "without iniquity have I run,"<sup>4</sup> and in another psalm, "I ran the way of Thy commandments, when Thou didst dilate my heart,"<sup>5</sup> and thus the soul ascends immediately from the sixth to the seventh degree which follows.

2. On the seventh step the soul becomes vehemently bold, in this intense and loving exaltation, no prudence can withhold it, no counsel control it, no shame restrain it; for the favor which God hath shown it has made it vehemently bold. This explains to us those words of the Apostle, that charity "believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things."<sup>6</sup> It was on this step that Moses spoke, when he said unto God: "Either forgive them this trespass, or if Thou do not, strike me out of the book that Thou hast written."<sup>7</sup> Men of this spirit obtain from God what they so lovingly pray for. Hence the words of David: "Delight in the Lord, and He will give thee the requests of thy heart."<sup>8</sup>

3. Standing on this step, the bride was bold, and said, "Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth."<sup>9</sup> But consider well here, it is not lawful to be thus bold, unless the soul feels that the interior favor of the King's sceptre is extended to it,<sup>10</sup> lest it should fall down the steps already ascended; in all of which humility must ever be preserved. From this boldness and courage which God grants to the soul on the seventh step, that it may be bold with Him in the vehemence of its love, the soul ascends to the eighth, where it lays hold of the Beloved and is united to Him.

4. On the eighth step the soul embraces the Beloved and holds Him fast, according to the words of the bride: "I found Him Whom my soul loveth; I held Him; and I will not let Him go."<sup>11</sup> On this step of union the desires of the soul are satisfied, but not without interruption. Some souls ascend to this step and at once fall back; if they did not, and remained there, they would have attained to a certain state of blessedness in this life, and thus the soul tarries but briefly on this step of the ladder. Daniel, being a man of desires, was bidden, on the part of God, to remain here: "Daniel, thou man of desires, stand upright."<sup>12</sup> After this comes the ninth step, which is that of the perfect.

5. On the ninth step the soul is on fire sweetly. This step is that of the perfect who burn away sweetly in God, for this sweet and delicious burning is the work of the Holy Ghost because of the union of the soul with God. St. Gregory says of the Apostles, that they burned interiorly with love sweetly, when the Holy Ghost descended upon them.<sup>13</sup> The blessings and the riches of God which the soul now enjoys cannot be described. And if we were to write many books on the subject there would still be more to say. For this reason, and because I intend to speak of it hereafter,<sup>14</sup> I shall now say no more of this step, except that it is immediately followed by the tenth and the last, which does not belong to this life.

6. On the tenth step of the ladder the soul becomes wholly assimilated unto God in the beatific vision which it then immediately<sup>15</sup> enjoys; for having ascended in this life to the ninth, it goes forth out of the body. For these—they are few—being perfectly purified by love, do not pass through purgatory.<sup>16</sup> For according to St. Matthew, "Blessed are the clean in heart, for they shall see God."<sup>17</sup> As I have said, the vision is the cause of the soul's perfect likeness unto God. "We know," says St. John,



“that, when He shall appear, we shall be like to Him, because we shall see Him as He is.”<sup>18</sup> Not that the soul shall be as great as God, for that is not possible, but inasmuch as the soul is capable of it,<sup>19</sup> it will be like unto God, and so is called, and is, by participation, God.

7. This is the secret ladder of which the soul speaks, though in the higher steps no longer secret, for love reveals itself exceedingly in the great effects it produces. But on the highest step, the beatific vision, the last of the ladder, where God is leaning, as I said before,<sup>20</sup> nothing remains secret from the soul, by reason of its perfect likeness. And, therefore, our Savior says, “In that day you shall not ask me anything.”<sup>21</sup> Until that day come, notwithstanding the heights to which the soul ascends, something still remains secret from it, and that in proportion to the distance from its perfect likeness to the Divine Essence. In this way, then, by means of mystical theology and secret love, the soul goes forth from all things and from itself, ascending upwards unto God. For love is like fire, which ever ascends, hastening to be absorbed in the center of its sphere.

***The Meaning of “Disguised”;  
The Colors in Which the Soul  
Disguises Itself in This Night***

*1. The disguise. 2. Why it is necessary. 3. Three colors: white, green, and purple. 4. Faith the breastplate of defense against the devil 5. Inner garment of faith. 6. When and how assumed. 7. Hope the helmet of protection against the world. 8. Description of the helmet. 9. The soul by hope obtains its desires. 10. The royal robe of charity shields the soul from the flesh. 11. The intellect vested in faith, the memory in hope. 12. The will in charity.*

HAVING now explained why contemplation is called a secret ladder, I have further to explain what is meant by the word “disguised”; for the soul says that it went forth by the secret ladder “disguised.”

2. For the understanding of the whole matter it is necessary to keep in mind that to be disguised is nothing else but to hide oneself under another form than our own, either for the purpose of showing under that concealment the will and purpose of the heart with a view to gain the goodwill and affection of the person beloved, or for the purpose of escaping the observation of rivals, and thereby the better effect our object. Such a person assumes the disguise which shall most represent and manifest the affection of his heart, and which shall the best conceal him from his rivals.

3. The soul, then, touched with the love of its Bridegroom Christ, that it may gain His favor and goodwill, sallies forth in that disguise which shall most vividly represent the affections of the mind and secure it against the assaults of its enemies, the devil, the world, and the flesh.<sup>1</sup> The disguise it assumes is, therefore, a garment of three principal colors, white, green, and purple, emblems of the three theological virtues, faith, hope, and charity; by the help of which it shall not only enter into the good graces of the Beloved, but shall also be most secure and protected against its three enemies.

4. The faith is a garment of such surpassing whiteness as to dazzle the eyes of every understanding; for when the soul has put on faith it becomes invisible and inaccessible to the devil, because it is then most securely defended against him—better even than by the other virtues<sup>2</sup>—its strongest and most cunning foe.

5. St. Peter knew of no better defense against the devil than faith, for he says, “whom resist, steadfast in faith.”<sup>3</sup> And with a view of entering into favor and union with the Beloved, the soul cannot put on a better garment, as the ground of the other virtues, than the white tunic of faith, for without it, the Apostle says, “It is impossible to please God.”<sup>4</sup> But with a living faith the soul cannot but be<sup>5</sup> pleasing and acceptable unto God, for He says so Himself by the mouth of the prophet: “I will espouse thee to Me in faith.”<sup>6</sup> It is as if He says to the soul, If thou wilt be united and betrothed to Me, thou must draw near inwardly clad in faith.

6. The soul put on the white robe of faith on its going forth on this dark night, when walking in the darkness amidst interior trials, as I said before,<sup>7</sup> it received no ray of light from the understanding; not from above, because heaven seemed shut and God hidden; not from below, because its spiritual directors gave it no comfort. It bore its trials patiently and persevered, without fainting or falling away from the Beloved, Who by these crosses and tribulations tried the faith of His bride, that it might be able hereafter truly to say with the Psalmist, “For the words of Thy lips, I have kept hard ways.”<sup>8</sup>

7. Over the white robe of faith the soul puts on forthwith that of the second color, a green coat,<sup>9</sup> emblem of the virtue of hope, by which it is delivered and protected from its second enemy, the world. The freshness of a living hope in God fills the soul with such energy and resolution, with such aspirations after the things of eternal life, that all this world seems to it—as indeed it is—in comparison with that which it hopes for, dry, withered, dead, and worthless. The soul now denudes itself of the garments and trappings of the world, by setting the heart upon nothing that is in it, and hoping for nothing that is, or may be, in it, living only in the hope of everlasting life. And, therefore, when the heart is thus lifted up above the world, the world cannot touch it or lay hold of it, nor even see it.

8. The soul then, thus disguised and clad in the vesture of hope, is secure from its second foe, the world, for St. Paul

calls hope the helmet of salvation.<sup>10</sup> Now a helmet is armor which protects and covers the whole head, and has no opening except in one place, where the eyes may look through. Hope is such a helmet, for it covers all the senses of the head of the soul in such a way that they cannot be lost in worldly things, and leaves no part of them exposed to the arrows of the world. It has one loophole only through which the eyes may look upwards only; this is the ordinary work of hope, to direct the eyes of the soul to God alone; as David says, “My eyes are always to our Lord,”<sup>11</sup> looking for succor nowhere else; as he says in another psalm, “As the eyes of the handmaid on the hands of her mistress, so are our eyes to our Lord God until He have mercy on us,”<sup>12</sup> hoping in Him.

9. The green vesture of hope—for the soul is then ever looking upwards unto God, disregarding all else, and delighting only in Him—is so pleasing to the Beloved that the soul obtains from Him all it hopes for. This is why He tells the soul in the *Canticle*, “Thou hast wounded My heart in one of thine eyes.”<sup>13</sup> It would have been useless for the soul, if it had not put on the green robe of hope in God, to claim such love, for it would not have succeeded, because that which influences the Beloved, and prevails, is persevering hope. It is in the vesture of hope that the soul goes forth disguised in this secret and dark night; seeing that it goes forth so detached from all possession, without any consolations, that it regards nothing, and that its sole anxiety is about God, putting its “mouth in the dust if so be there may be hope” in the words of Jeremiah quoted already.<sup>14</sup>

10. Over the white and green robes, as the crown and perfection of its disguise, the soul puts on the third, the splendid robe of purple. This is the emblem of charity, which not only enhances the beauty of the others, but which so elevates the soul and renders it so lovely and pleasing in His eyes that it ventures to say to Him, “I am black but beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, therefore hath the king loved me and brought me into His secret chamber.”<sup>15</sup> This robe of charity, which is that of love, not only defends and protects the soul from its third enemy, the flesh—for where the true love of God is there is no room for self-love or for selfishness—but strengthens the other virtues also, and makes them flourish for the protection of the soul, beautifying it and adorning it with grace, so that it shall please the Beloved; for without charity no virtue is pleasing unto God. This is the purple, spoken of in the *Canticle*, by which the soul ascends to the seat where God reposes: “the seat of gold, the going up of purple.”<sup>16</sup> It is vested in this robe of purple that the soul journeys, as the first stanza declares, when in the dark night it went out of itself, and from all created things, with anxious love inflamed, by the secret ladder of contemplation to the perfect union of the love of God its beloved Savior.

11. This, then, is that disguise which the soul says it puts on in the night of faith on the secret ladder; and these are the three colors of it, namely, a certain most fitting disposition for its union with God in its three powers, memory, understanding, and will. Faith blinds the understanding, and empties it of all natural intelligence, and thereby disposes it for union with the divine wisdom. Hope empties the memory and withdraws it from all created things which can possess it; for as St. Paul says, “Hope that is seen is not hope.”<sup>17</sup> Thus the memory is withdrawn from all things on which it might dwell in this life, and is fixed on what the soul hopes to possess. Hope in God alone, therefore, purely disposes the memory according to the measure of the emptiness it has wrought for union with Him.

12. Charity in the same way empties the affections and desires of the will of everything that is not God, and fixes them on Him alone. This virtue of charity, then, disposes the will and unites it with God in love. And because these virtues—it being their special work—withdraw the soul from all that is not God, so also do they serve to unite the soul to Him. It is impossible for the soul to attain to the perfection of the love of God unless it journeys, in earnest, in the robes of these three virtues. This disguise, therefore, which the soul assumed when it went forth in order to obtain that which it aimed at, the loving and delightful union with the Beloved, was most necessary and expedient. And it was also a great happiness to have succeeded in thus disguising itself and persevering in it until it obtained the desired end, the union of love, as it declares in the next line.

*Explains the Third Line of the Second Stanza; Happiness of the Soul in Having Overcome Its Enemies**O Happy Lot!*

IT IS very evident that it was a blessed thing for the soul to have succeeded in such an enterprise as this, by which it was delivered out of the hands of Satan, from the world, and from its own sensuality, in which, having gained that liberty of spirit so precious and desirable, it rose from meanness to dignity, from being earthly and human because heavenly and divine, having its “conversation in Heaven,”<sup>1</sup> like unto those who are in a state of perfection, as I shall proceed to explain.

2. I shall, however, be brief, because the most important point—that which chiefly determined me to explain this dark night to many souls who enter on it without knowing it, as I said in the preface—has been already in some degree explained, and I have also shown, though not in adequate terms, how great are the blessings that descend upon the soul in this night, and what a great happiness it is to be passing through it. This I did that when such souls are alarmed at the trials that have come upon them, they may be encouraged by the certain hope of the numerous and great blessings of God which they receive in this night. Besides this, it was a happy lot for the soul for the reason assigned in the following line.

***Explains the Fourth Line—Describes the Wonderful Hiding Place of the Soul in This Night, And How the Devil, Though He Enters Other Most Secret Places, Enters Not This***

*1. Explanation. 2. Darkness and concealment. 3. Sense should be ignorant of what happens in the spirit. 4. The devil ascertains the state of the spirit by evidences of the sensitive nature. 5. The spiritual assaults of Satan. 6. Spirit against spirit. 7. The soul the prize of a contest. 8. Moses and the magicians of Egypt. 9. Satan cannot imitate spiritual visions. 10. God suffers the devil to afflict the soul. 11. Neither angel nor devil can penetrate the soul directly. 12. & 13. Continuation. 14. The soul conscious of two forces. 15. Conclusion.*

*In Darkness and Concealment*

“**I**N CONCEALMENT,” that is, secretly or hidden. So when the soul says that it went forth in darkness and concealment, it explains more clearly the great safety spoken of in the first line of this stanza—which it finds in this dim contemplation on the road of the union of the love of God.

2. The words of the soul “darkness and concealment” mean here that the soul, because it went forth in the dark, traveled in secret, undiscovered by the evil one, beyond the reach of his wiles and stratagems. The reason why the soul is free, concealed from the devil and his wiles in the dimness of this contemplation, is that infused contemplation, to which it is now admitted, is passively infused into it, in secret, without the cognizance of the senses, and of the interior and exterior powers of the sensual part. And that, too, is the reason why it escapes, not only from the embarrassments which the faculties, and naturally, through their weakness, present before it, but also from the evil one,<sup>1</sup> who, were it not for the sensual faculties, could never know what is passing in the soul. The more spiritual therefore the communication is, and the further it is removed beyond the reach of sense, the less able is the devil to perceive it.

3. This being so, it greatly concerns the soul’s security, that the lower senses should be in the dark, and have no knowledge of the interior conversation of the soul with God, and that for two reasons; first, that the spiritual communication may be the more abundant, for then the weakness of the sensual part hinders not liberty of spirit. The second is that the soul is more secure because the evil one cannot know what is passing within it. The words of our Lord, “Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doth,”<sup>2</sup> may be, in a spiritual sense, understood of this, and we may understand Him to say: Let not thy left hand, that is man’s lower nature, know what is passing in the higher and spiritual part of the soul. That is, let the divine communications remain unknown to the lower senses, and a secret between the spirit and God.

4. It is very true, that oftentimes when these interior and most secret spiritual communications are made to the soul, the devil, though he knows neither their nature nor their form, ascertains their presence, and that the soul is then receiving some great blessings, merely from observing the silence and repose some of them effect in the senses, and in the powers of our lower nature. And then, when he sees that he cannot thwart them in the inmost depth of the soul, he does all he can to disquiet and disturb the sensual part which is accessible to him, now by pain and at another time by horrible dread, intending thereby to trouble the higher and spiritual part of the soul, and to frustrate the blessings it then receives and enjoys.

5. But very often when this contemplation pours its light purely into the spirit and exerts its strength therein, the devil, with all his efforts, is not able to disturb it,<sup>3</sup> for then the soul becomes the recipient of renewed benefits, love, and a more secure peace; for, wonderful to tell!, in its consciousness of the disturbing presence of the foe, it enters deeply into itself, without knowing how it comes to pass and without any action on its own part,<sup>4</sup> and feels assured of a certain refuge where it can hide itself beyond the reach of the evil one; and thus its peace and joy are increased, of which the devil attempted to rob it. All those terrors assail it only from without; it sees clearly, and exults, that it can in the meanwhile securely enjoy in secret the calm peace and sweetness of the Bridegroom, which the world and the devil can neither give nor take away. The soul is now experiencing the truth of that which the bride says in the Canticle, “Behold, threescore valiants . . . compass the bed of

Solomon . . . for fears by night.”<sup>5</sup> Strength and peace abound within the soul, though it feels the flesh and the bones frequently tormented without.

6. At other times, when the spiritual communications flow over into the senses, the devil succeeds the more easily in disquieting the mind, and in disturbing it with the terrors with which he assails it through the senses. At that time the mental agonies are great, and occasionally surpassing all description; for when spirit has to do with spirit, the evil one causes an intolerable horror in the good one, that is, in the soul, when it succeeds in disturbing it. This is the meaning of the bride in her account of that which happened to her when she tried to be interiorly recollected, so as to have the fruition of these goods: “I came down,” she says, “into the garden of nuts to see the fruits of the valleys, and to look if the vineyard had flourished. . . . I knew not; my soul troubled me for the chariots and the noise of Aminadab,” that is the devil.<sup>6</sup>

7. This attack of the devil takes place also when God bestows His favors upon a soul by the instrumentality of a good angel; sometimes he even perceives the favors granted by God Himself, and ordinarily those bestowed on the soul through the instrumentality of a good angel<sup>7</sup> become known to the enemy, that he may do what he can, according to the measure of justice, against that soul, and that he may be debarred from pleading that he had no opportunity of seizing on that soul as he did in the case of Job, which would be the case if God did not<sup>8</sup> place these two combatants, the good angel and the devil, on an equality when they contend for the soul, in order that the victory may be of greater worth, and that the soul, triumphant and faithful in temptation, may be the more abundantly rewarded.

8. This is the reason—and it is right we should observe it—why God, in the order of grace and in just proportion to His own operation,<sup>9</sup> permits Satan to disquiet and tempt the soul which He is guiding therein. When such a soul has real visions, through the instrumentality of an angel (this being the rule, whereas it hardly ever happens that Christ appears in His own person),<sup>10</sup> God suffers the evil spirit to represent false visions of the same kind, in such a way that an incautious soul may be very easily deluded, as it has happened to many. We have an instance of this in Exodus, where we read that the magicians of Pharaoh wrought apparently signs and wonders resembling those really wrought by Moses. For when Moses brought forth frogs, the magicians of Egypt did the same; and when he turned water into blood, so did the magicians.<sup>11</sup>

9. It is not in bodily visions only that the evil spirit apes God, but in spiritual communications also, which are effected through the instrumentality of an angel, whenever he succeeds in discovering them. For as Job says, “He seeth every high thing,”<sup>12</sup> that is, he apes them, and insinuates himself among them as well as he can. Spiritual visions have neither form nor figure<sup>13</sup>—that is the characteristic of spirit—and, therefore, Satan cannot imitate them, nor occasion others which shall in any way represent them. And so when the good angel communicates spiritual contemplation, the evil spirit, while the soul is being thus visited, appears to it in order to attack and destroy one spiritual effect by another. When this happens at the time the good angel imparts to the soul the favor of contemplation, the latter cannot so swiftly hide itself in the secrecy of contemplation as not to be watched by Satan who<sup>14</sup> presents himself before it with a certain horror and spiritual confusion, which is occasionally exceedingly painful. Sometimes the soul can quickly disembarass itself, so that the terror of the evil spirit shall have no time to make any impression upon it, and recollects itself, favored herein by that spiritual grace which the good angel then communicates.

10. Sometimes, too, the evil spirit prevails and infests the soul with this horror and trouble, and this is a greater torment to the soul than all the evils of this life can be; for this horrible communication goes straight from spirit to spirit, divested of all that is corporal, in a manner painful beyond all bodily suffering. This lasts some time in the spirit only, but not long, else the vehemence of the communication of the evil spirit would drive the soul from the body; but the remembrance of it is sufficient to produce great pain.<sup>15</sup> All this passes in the soul without its doing or undoing anything of itself to bring about these representations or impressions. But we must remember that, when the good angel<sup>16</sup> suffers the evil spirit thus to afflict the soul, it is with a view to purify and prepare it by that spiritual vigil for some great festival and spiritual grace which it is his will to bestow upon it, for he never mortifies but to give life, and never humbles but to exalt. This speedily ensues; for the soul, according to the measure of the dark purgation it has undergone, enters on the fruition of sweet spiritual contemplation, and that so sublime at times that no language can describe it. The horror of the evil spirit so refines the soul as to render it capable of so great a good, for these spiritual visions appertain to the next life rather than to this; and while one is being seen another is in preparation.<sup>17</sup> This is to be understood of those visitations which God makes by the ministry of an angel, and wherein the soul, as I said before,<sup>18</sup> is not wholly secure, nor in such darkness and concealment as to be altogether unobserved by the enemy.

11. But when God visits the soul Himself,<sup>19</sup> the words of the stanza are then true, for, in perfect darkness hidden from the enemy, it receives, at such times, the spiritual graces of God. The reason of the difference is that God, being the sovereign Lord, dwells substantially in the soul, and that neither angel nor devil can discover what is going on there, nor penetrate the profound and secret communications which take place between Him and the soul. These communications, because the work of our Lord Himself, are wholly divine and supreme, and, as it were, substantial touches of the divine union between Himself and the soul; in one of these, because it is the highest possible degree of prayer, the soul receives greater good than in all the rest.

These are the touches for which the bride in the Canticle prayed, saying, “Let Him kiss me with the kiss of His mouth.”<sup>20</sup>

12. This being a state so near unto God, into which the soul so anxiously longs to enter, one touch of the Godhead is prized and desired by it above all the other gifts which God grants it. For this reason the bride in the Canticle, after the great things wrought in her, of which she there sings, not finding them enough, prays for the divine touches, saying: “Who shall give to me Thee my brother, sucking the breasts of my mother, that I may find Thee without, and kiss Thee with the mouth of my soul, and now no man despise me,<sup>21</sup> or presume to assail me.” These words relate to that communication which God makes alone, without, and hidden from all creatures; that is the meaning of the words “alone,” “without,” and “sucking,” drying up and causing to wither the breasts, that is the appetites and affections of the sensual part.<sup>22</sup> This occurs when the soul in liberty of spirit enjoys these blessings in sweetness and inward peace, the sensual part thereof unable to hinder it, and the devil by means of it not able to disturb it.

13. Then indeed the evil spirit would not venture to assail the soul, because he could not succeed, neither can he know of those divine touches in the substance of the soul with the loving substance of God.<sup>23</sup> No man can arrive at this blessed condition but by the most perfect purgation and detachment, by being spiritually hidden from all created things. It is a work wrought in the dark (as has been fully explained above, and again with reference to this verse),<sup>24</sup> in the hiding place, wherein the soul is confirmed more and more in union with God by love; and, therefore, the soul sings, “In darkness and concealment.”

14. Sometimes when these favors are granted to the soul in secret, that is, in the spirit only, the higher and lower portions of the soul seem to it—it knows not how—to be so far apart that it recognizes two parts in itself, each so distinct from the other that neither seems to have anything in common with the other, being in appearance so far removed and apart. And, in reality, this is in a certain manner true, for in its present operations, which are wholly spiritual, it has no commerce with the sensual part.

15. Thus the soul becomes wholly spiritual, and the spiritual passions and desires are in a high degree suppressed in this hiding place of unitive contemplation. The soul then, speaking of its higher part, sings the last line of this stanza, “My house being now at rest.”



*Concludes the Explanation of the Second Stanza*

*1. Explanation. 2. Twofold rest: the flesh at peace with the spirit, the spirit with God. 3. Divine espousals. 4. Continuation.*

*My House Being Now at Rest*

**T**HIS is as much as saying, My higher nature and my lower nature also, each in its desires and powers, being now at rest, I went forth to the divine union of the love of God.

2. As in the warfare of the dark night, as I said before,<sup>1</sup> the soul undergoes a twofold contest and purgation: that is, in the sensual and the spiritual part, with their senses, powers, and passions, so also, in the sensual and spiritual parts, with all their powers and desires, does it attain to a twofold peace and rest. For this reason it repeats the words, as I said before,<sup>2</sup> “My house being now at rest,” at the end of the second stanza, because of the two parts of the soul, spiritual and sensual, which, if they are to go forth into the divine union of love, must first of all be changed, ordered, and tranquilized with regard to all the things of sense and spirit, after the likeness of the state of innocence in Adam, notwithstanding that the soul be not wholly delivered from the temptations of the lower part. These words, therefore, which in the first stanza are understood of the tranquility of the lower and sensual part, now, in the second stanza, are understood particularly of the higher and spiritual part; and this is the reason of the repetition.

3. The soul obtains this tranquility and rest of the spiritual house, habitually and perfectly—so far as it is possible in this life—through the substantial touches of the divine union, of which I have just spoken,<sup>3</sup> and which, in secret, hidden from the turmoil of Satan, sense, and passion, it receives from the Divinity, whereby it has been tranquilized, purified, strengthened, and confirmed, so as to become an effectual partaker of that union which is its divine betrothal to the Son of God. The instant the two houses of the soul are tranquil and confirmed, with the whole household of its powers and desires sunk in sleep and silence, as to all things of heaven and earth, the divine Wisdom, immediately in a new bond of loving possession, unites itself to the soul, and that is fulfilled which is written, “While quiet silence contained all things and the night was in the mid-way of her course, Thy omnipotent Word sallying out of heaven from the royal seats.”<sup>4</sup> The same truth is set before us in the Canticle, where the bride, after passing by those who took her veil away and wounded her, says, “When I had a little passed by them, I found Him whom my soul loveth.”<sup>5</sup>

4. This union is unattainable without great purity, and this purity is attainable only by detachment from all created things and sharp mortifications. This is signified by the robbery of the veil and the wounding of the bride in the night when she went forth searching after her beloved; for the new veil of the betrothal cannot be put on till the old veil be taken away. He, therefore, who will not go out in this dark night to seek the Beloved, who will not deny and mortify his own will, but seek Him at his ease on his bed, as the bride once did,<sup>6</sup> will never find Him. The soul says here that it found Him, as the soul says of itself that it found Him by going forth in the dark, and in the anxieties of love.



*In Which the Third Stanza Is Briefly Explained*

1. Explanation. 2. Blessings of the spiritual night. 3. Second blessing. 4. To suffer but not to die.

*In that happy night,  
In secret, seen of none,  
Seeing nought myself,  
Without other light or guide  
Save that which in my heart was burning.*

THE soul still continues the metaphor of natural night in celebrating and magnifying the blessings of the night of the spirit, by means of which it has been able quickly and securely to compass the desired end. Three of these blessings are set before us in this stanza.

2. The first is that in this blessed night of contemplation God is guiding the soul by a road so solitary and so secret, so remote and alien from sense, that nothing belonging thereto, nor any created thing, can approach it so as to disturb it or detain it on the road of the union of love.

3. The second blessing is that because of the spiritual darkness of this night, in which all the faculties of the higher part of the soul are in darkness, the soul, seeing nothing, and unable to see, is not detained by anything which is not God from drawing near unto Him, and, therefore, advances unhindered by forms and figures and natural apprehensions: for these are the things which usually hinder the soul from being always in union with God.

4. The third blessing is, that though the soul is supported by no particular interior light of the understanding, nor by any exterior guide comforting it on this high road—the thick darkness has deprived it of all this—yet love and faith, now burning within it, drawing the heart towards the Beloved, influence and guide it, and make it fly upwards to God along the road of solitude, while it knows neither how nor by what means that is done.

*In that happy night,  
In secret, seen of none,  
Seeing nought myself,  
Without other light or guide  
Save that which in my heart was burning.*

1. *Dark Night*, Bk. I. Ch. VIII. §2.
2. *Imitation*. II. xi.
3. *Imitation*. II. ix.
4. *Living Flame* (ed. 1912), 270.
5. St. John of the Cross wrote: “As I scattered His hair in the breeze.” Cuando yo sus cabellos esparcía.
6. St. Matt. 7:14.
7. Ch. VIII.
8. La cual pasivamente causa en el alma la negación de sí misma, etc.
1. Lo cual, aunque será con, la brevedad que pudiere, no dejará de servir tambien á los mismos principiantes.
2. *Wisdom* 16:25. In omnia transfigurata omnium nutrici gratæ tuæ deserviebat.
3. Ch. XII. 2.
1. Les nace cierta gana algo vana y á veces muy vana.
2. *Luke* 18:11, 12.
3. Que no querrian que pareciese otro bueno sino ellos.
4. *Matt.* 7:3.
5. *Ibid.* 23:24.
6. §7.
7. *Matt.* 25:8.
8. Más gana tienen de decir sus faltas y pecados, ó que los entiendan, que no sus virtudes.
9. See St. Teresa, *Relation*, VII, II.
10. §6.
11. Ch. VIII. §5.
  1. No me da más que sean cosas espirituales que temporales.
  2. Ch. VIII. §5.
  3. Bk. II, Ch. X.
    1. Sino porque procede de cosas espirituales.
    2. Y actos torpes.
    3. This parenthesis is not in the MSS.
    4. Y toma entonces el más conjunto á sí, que es el sensual torpe.
  5. Movimientos y actos sensuales pasivamente, no sin harta desgana suya; lo cual muchas veces acaece en la comunión, que como en este acto de amor recibe el alma alegría y regalo, porque se le hace este Señor (pues para eso se da), la sensualidad toma también el suyo (como habemos dicho) á su modo.
  6. On this difficult and delicate subject see the letters of St. Teresa to Maria- Bautista, prioress of Valladolid, of June 11th, 1574, and to her brother, Don Lorenzo de Cepeda, of January 17th and February 10th, 1577.
  7. Como esta la sensualidad imperfecta, recibe el espíritu de Dios muchas veces con la misma imperfección.
  8. The words within inverted commas are not in the MSS.
  9. Acobardarlas.
10. Porque padecen vida triste; porque llega á tanto en algunas personas este trabajo cuando tienen este mal humor, que les parece claro que sienten tener consigo acceso el demonio, sin ser libres para poderlo evitar: aunque algunas personas de estas pueden evitar el tal acceso con gran fuerza y trabajo . . . si no es que entrase la noche oscura en el alma, que la priva sucesivamente de todo.
11. Hay también algunas almas, de naturales tiernos y deleznales que en viniendoles, cualquier gusto de espíritu ó de oración luego es con ellos tambien el espíritu de lujuria, que de tal manera los embriaga y regala la sensualidad, que se hallan como engolfados en aquel jugo y gusto de este vicio, y dura el uno con el otro pasivamente y á veces se echa de ver haber sucedido algunas torpezas y rebeldes actos. La causa es, que como estos naturales sean, como digo, deleznales y tiernos, con cualquiera alteración se les revuelven los humores y la sangre; y suceden de aquí estos movimientos, porque á éstos lo mismo les acaece, cuando se encienden en ira ó tienen algun alboroto ó penas.
12. Ordinariamente.
13. *John* 3:6.
14. Ch. XIII, §11.
  1. See *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II. Ch. XVIII. §5.
  2. Que la pureza y discreción de él.
  3. . . . penitencia corporal, que, dejando aparte esotra, no es mas que penitencia de bestias, a que tambien como bestias, se mueven por el apetito, etc.
  4. See *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II. Ch. XI. §5 (VI).
  5. Y esto tienen por su Dios.
  6. Porque es impureza en la Fe.
    1. Y les crece como dicen, el ojo.
  2. *I Cor.* 13:6. Quoted not literally but according to the sense.
  3. *Matt.* 16:25.
  4. *Matt.* 7:14.
  5. Para ser hablada y tratada.
    1. Bk. II. Ch. I.
    2. Bk. II. Ch. V.
    3. Ch. I.
    4. Ch. VI. §7, and *Living Flame*, iii. 37.
    5. *Apoc.* 3:8.
    6. Ch. I.
    7. Por tanto, no quiero en esto gastar tiempo, porque el que allí no las supiere mirar, bastarle há la común experiencia que de ella se tiene.
  1. *Exod.* 16:15, *Wisd.* 16:21.
  2. *Numb.* 11:5.
  3. The words within single quotes are not in the MSS.
  4. *Cant.* 6:4.
  5. *Living Flame*, iii. 39.
  6. Solitaria, satisfactoria.
  7. *Ps.* 84:9.

8. Ni aun á la mitad.
1. Ch. IX. §5. See also *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III. Ch. XXXII. 4; Living Flame, iii. 39; St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, vi. M. vii. §10.
2. Ch. VIII. §4.
3. Y sin obrar con las potencias.
4. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II. Ch. XII. §10.
5. This paragraph within quotes is not in the MSS.; the doctrine contained in it is, of course, excellent. See St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, vi. M. vii. §10.
1. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II. Ch. XII, §4.
2. *Ps.* 72:21, 22.
3. *Ps.* 41:3.
4. Pero es de notar que la vehemencia, etc.
5. Tan flacas y tan limitadas.
6. *Matt.* 7:14.
7. Fundandose en Fe.
8. Bk. II. Ch. XII.
1. Ch. X. §3.
2. *Gen.* 21:8.
3. Ch. VII. §8.
4. *Exod.* 33:5.
5. *Exod.* 3:5.
6. *Ibid.* 6.
7. Como también, etc.
8. *Job.* 2:8; 30:17, 18.
9. *Ps.* 112:7.
10. El Altísimo Dios de descender y hablar allí cara á cara con él.
11. *Job* 38.
12. *Is.* 58:10.
13. *Ibid.* 28:19.
14. *Ibid.* 9.
15. á Dios.
16. Habak. 2:1.
17. *Ps.* 62:3.
18. Ch. II.
19. *Ps.* 38:3.
20. La presunción afectiva.
  1. Ch. IV.
  2. Ch. IV.
  3. Que queda el alma impuesta, reformada y empresada según la concupiscencia y apetitos. Pierde las fuerzas de las pasiones y con cupiscencia y se hace estéril no usandose al gusto, bien asi como no acostumbrando á sacar leche, y enjugados así los apetitos del alma, etc.
  4. Ch. IX. §3.
  5. Teologales como cardinales y morales, corporal y espiritualmente.
  6. *Ps.* 76:3, 4, 7.
  7. Ch. VII.
  8. Ch. IV. §9.
  9. Ch. IX. §11.
10. *Ps.* 1:19.
11. §11.
12. Ch. IX. §8.
  1. De los aprovechames y aprovechados.
  2. On the subject matter of this chapter see *Spiritual Canticle*, 31:6.
  3. *Is.* 19:14.
  4. Se les da . . . no porque caigan, sino porque los ejercite.
  5. *Eccles.* 34:9, 10, 11.
  6. *Jer.* 31:18.
  7. Y tentaciones . . . Tiempo es, pues, ya, de comenzar á tratar de la segunda noche.
1. En esta noche del espíritu.
2. Algunas necesidades, sequedades, etc.
3. *Ps.* 147:17.
4. St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, vi. M. xi. 4.
5. *Wisd.* 9:15.
1. Bk. I. Ch. XI. §3.
2. Como decimos.
3. Mayores inconvenientes.
4. En fe.
5. Hace el demonio creer á muchos visiones, etc.
6. Bk. II. Ch. II. §3; Bk. I. Ch. I. §4.
7. *Hos.* 2:20.
1. This sentence, grammatically incomplete in the manuscripts, has been corrected by the original editor.
2. Donde se sujetan los hábitos buenos y malos.
3. *I Cor.* 13:11.
4. Ch. IV. §2.
5. *Ephes.* 4:24.
6. *Rom.* 12:2.

7. Al propósito de la primera noche.
1. Desamparo y desarrimo de todas las aprehensiones.
2. Apetitos.
3. Y natural.
4. Por su vigor natural.
5. Bajamente con su fuerza natural.
1. So also in St. Teresa, *Life*, ch. x. 1.
2. The words in brackets are not in the MSS.
3. Aristot. *Metaphysic.* lib. 1. *prope finem*. “Ὡςπερ γὰρ τὰ τῶν νυκτερίδων ὄμματα πρὸς τὸ φέγγος ἔχει τὸ μεθ’ ἡμέραν, οὕτω καὶ τῆς ἡμετέρας ψυχῆς ὁ νοῦς πρὸς τὰ τῇ φύσει φανερώτατα πάντων.”
4. S. Dionysius, *De Mystica Theol.* c. I. in fine: ἦρ ς τ ν ἡερο σιον το ζε ου σκ τους κτ να.
5. *Ps.* 96:2.
6. *Ps.* 17:13.
7. Ambien en extremo malas.
8. *Job* 7:20.
9. Contabescer.
10. *Ps.* 38:12.
11. Y moral.
12. *Job* 23:6.
13. *Job* 19:21.
14. See *Living Flame*, ii. 16.
  1. See *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Prol. to Bk. I. §4
  2. La sustancia espiritual.
  3. *Ps.* 17:5, 6, 7.
  4. *Ibid.* 87:6, 7, 8.
  5. *Ibid.* 87:9.
  6. En el vientre de la bestia corporal y espiritualmente.
  7. *Jon.* 2:4-7.
  8. La magestad y grandeza de ella.
  9. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III. Ch. XXXII. §4.
10. En la sustancia del alma, suele padecer grandes gravedades, etc.
11. *Ezek.* 24:10.
12. *Ibid.* 24:11.
13. *Wisd.* 3:6.
14. *Ps.* 68:2-4.
15. The first Spanish editor added here the words “for venial sin,” and, in the next sentence, after “present life,” the clause: “and is perfectly purified.” They have been left out in the text as being unsupported by the MSS.
  1. St. Teresa, *Life*, ch. xxviii. 14.
  2. *Job* 16:13-17.
  3. Algo más.
  4. Lo cual por ser tanto lo dice y llora él par muchas palabras, en esta manera.
  5. *Lament.* 3:1-20.
  6. *Job* 12:22.
  7. *Ps.* 138:12.
  8. *Ibid.* 142:3.
  9. *Ps.* 29:7.
10. Y menos se cata.
11. . . . todo lo que á ella es contrario. Esta es la causa porque los que yacen en el purgatorio padecen grandes dudas de que han de salir de allí jamas, y de que se han de acabar sus penas. Porque aunque habitualmente tienen las tres virtudes teologales, fe, esperanza y caridad, la actualidad que tienen del sentimiento de las penas y privación de Dios, no les deja gozar del bien actual y consuelo de estas virtudes: porque, aunque ellos echan de ver que quieren bien á Dios, no les consuela ésto, porque no les parece que los quiere Dios á ellos in que de tal cosa son dignos; antes como se ven privados de él, puestos en sus miserias, paréceles que tienen muy bien en si por que ser aborrecidos y desechados de Dios con mucha razón para siempre.

This remarkable passage occurs in eight manuscripts, but not in the two most important ones, those of Burgos and Alba, whence the editor of the *Edición crítica* (ii. 71) concludes that the Saint himself may have struck it out when revising his writings.
12. No pudiendo creer lo que Dios la quiere á ella, ni que tiene ni tendrá jamás, etc.
  1. *Lament*, 3:44.
  2. Ch. VII. §2.
  3. *Lament.* 3:9.
  4. *Ibid.* 3:8.
  5. No es este tiempo de hablar con Dios, sino de poner, etc.
  6. *Lament.* 3:29.
  7. See *Interior Castle*, vi. M. ch. vii. 10.
  8. *Ps.* 72:22.
  9. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II. Ch. XIV. §10, where, however, the sense has been changed by the omission of the negation: “. . . strikes the soul with such force,” whereas the manuscripts have “. . . does *not* strike the soul with such force.”
10. This excellent likeness was omitted in the original edition because it had already been used in the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II. Ch. XIV. §8.

Y para que más claro se entienda, pondremos aquí una semejanza de la luz natutal y común. Vemos que en el rayo del sol, que entra por la ventana, cuanto más puro y limpio es de átomos, tanto menos claramente se ve, y cuanto más de átomos y motas tiene el aire, tanto más claro parece al ojo. La causa es, porque la luz no es la que se ve por si misma, sino el medio con que se ven las demás cosas que embiste. Y entonces ella, por la reverberación que hace en ellas, también se ve, y si no diese en ellas, ni ella se vería. De tal manera que si el rayo del sol entrase por la ventana de un aposento, y pasase por otra de la otra parte, por medio del aposento, como no tocase en alguna cosa, ni hubiese en él aire, ni átomos en que reverberase, no tendría el aposento más luz que antes, ni el rayo se echaría de ver; antes, si bien se mirase, entonces hay más obscuridad, por donde está el rayo, porque priva y oscurece algo de la otra luz, y él no se ve, porque

como habemos dicho, no hay objetos visibles en que pueda reverberar. Pues ni más in menos hace este divino rayo de contemplación en el alma, que embistiendo en ella con su lumbré divina excede el natural del alma.

11. . . . como habemos dicho del rayo, que, aunque está en medio del aposento, si está puro y no tiene en qué topar, no se ve. Pero con esta luz espiritual de que esta embestida el alma, cuando tiene en que reverberar, esto es cuando se ofrece alguna cosa que entender espiritual de perfección, por mínima átomo que sea, etc.

12. Que habemos dicho está oscuro en el aposento, aunque él no se ve, etc.

13. Natural ni Divino.

14. *1 Cor.* 2:10.

15. *Wisd.* 7:24.

16. *2 Cor.* 6:10.

1. *Wisd.* 16:20, 21.

2. Como hacen dos contrarios que no pueden estar juntos en un sujeto.

3. Parecen tinieblas sustanciales.

4. Pueda venir á sentir y gustar.

5. Que no cae en la voluntad naturalmente.

6. *Tob.* 8:2.

7. Porque en tan flaco é impuro natural no la puede recibir.

8. *Is.* 64:4; *1 Cor.* 2:9.

9. *Is.* 26:17, 18.

10 *Phil.* 4:7.

11. Esto es, que tenía ya adquirida, la paz del sentido y del espíritu, segun se veía llena de abundancias espirituales de esta paz del sentido y del espíritu, porque como digo, aún es imperfecta, etc.

12. *Lament.* 3:17.

13. *Ps.* 37:9.

14. Tanto se levanta y cerca en dolor y pena, las afecciones del alma.

15. *Job* 3:24.

16. *Job* 30:17.

17. *Job* 30:16.

18. Y vacía y pobre de ellos.

19. *Lament.* 3:17.

20. Bk. II. Ch. V. §1, 2.

1. Y aun de mal olor.

2. Y más fea y abominable que solía.

3. *Wisd.* 7:11.

4. *Eccles.* 50:25-29.

5. Porque el fuego no tendra en ellos poder, aunque se les aplicase, si ellos no tuviesen imperfecciones en qué padecer, etc.

6. Ch. VII. §9.

7. This paragraph appears to have been omitted inadvertently in the first and consequently in every successive edition.

Lo sexto también se sacará de aquí, la causa por qué le parece al alma que todo bien se le acaló, y que está llena de males, pues otra cosa en este tiempo no la llega, sino todo amarguras; así también como al madero que arde, que aire in otra cosa da en él, más que fuego consumidor. Pero después que se hagan otras muestras como las primeras, gozara mas de adentro, porque ya se hizo la purificación más adentro.

8. Ch. III.

1. Ch. X.

2. Bk. I, Ch. VIII. §1.

3. Ch. IX. §3.

4. Es más pasivo que activo.

5. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III. Ch. XVI. §1.

6. Las cuales se sujetan en ella pasivamente aunque el alma lo que aquí hace es dar el consentimiento.

7. Bk. I. Ch. I. §2.

8. *Ps.* 58:10.

9. *Deut.* 6:5.

10. *Ps.* 58:15, 16. Como los canes que decía David rodearon la ciudad, y no se viendo hartos de este amor, quedan ahullando y gimiendo.

11. *Ps.* 62:2.

12. *Job* 7:2-4.

13. *Is.* 26:9.

1. Así como se purgan los espíritus en la otra vida . . . en esta vida se purgan y limpian, etc.

2. St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, vi. M. xi.6.

3. *Ps.* 1:12.

4. *Lament*, 1:13.

5. *Ps.* 11:7.

6. “Ignorantias meas illuminavit.” These words have been expunged from *Eccles.* li. 26, by the Roman censure. See *Living Flame*, iii. 80.

7. Haciéndolos saber, alumbrándolos en lo que no sabían.

8. Scot. ii. Sent. dist. 10, qu. unic. Secundum communem processum et ordinem revelantur majora Dei mysteria superioribus priusquam inferioribus, et ita superiores mittuntur ad inferiores, loquendo et illuminando eos interius, et alii inferiores mittuntur exterius ad illa revelata nuncianda hominibus vel explenda.

9. El hombre que esta el postrero, hasta el cual se viene derivando esta contemplación amorosa.

10. Ch. X. §1.

11. Andando el tiempo.

12. Y sin ella hacer nada.

13. *Ps.* 38:4.

14. Porque es cierto toque en la divinidad y ya principios de la perfección, etc.

15. See *Spiritual Canticle*, xxvi. 2 and a passage of the *Living Flame*, iii. 51, omitted in the former editions. See also St. Teresa, *Conceptions*, vi. 11.

De lo que aquí habemos dicho se colige, colige en estos bienes espirituales, que pasivamente se infunden por Dios en el alma, puede muy bien amar la voluntad sin entender el entendimiento; así como el entendimiento puede entender sin que ame la voluntad; porque pues esta noche oscura de contemplación

consta de luz divina y amor, así como el fuego tiene luz y calor, no es inconveniente, que cuando se comunica esta luz amorosa, algunas veces hiera más en la voluntad inflamandola con el amor, dejando a oscuras el entendimiento sin herir en él con la luz; y otras, alumbrándole con la luz, dando inteligencia, dejando seca la voluntad (como también acaece poder recibir el calor del fuego sin ver la luz, y también ver la luz sin recibir el calor), y esto obrándolo el Señor, que infunde como quiere.

1. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. III. Ch. XXXII. §4.

2. *John* 1:5.

3. Quedandose seca la voluntad, quiero decir, sin union actual de amor.

4. Que se unen algunas veces estas dos potencias entendimiento y voluntad, etc.

5. Pero nace aquí una duda, y es: ¿Porqué, pues, estas dos potencias se van purgando á la par, se siente á los principios más comunmente en la voluntad la inflamación y amor de la contemplación purgativa, que en el entendimiento la inteligencia de ella? A esto se responde, que aquí no hiere derechamente este amor pasivo en la voluntad, porque la voluntad es libre, y esta inflamación de amor más es pasión de amor que acto libre de la voluntad, porque hiere en la sustancia del alma este calor de amor, y así mueve las afecciones pasivamente. Y así ésta antes se llama pasión de amor que acto libre de la voluntad: el cual en tanto se llama acto de la voluntad en cuanto es libre. Pero porque estas pasiones y afecciones se reducen á la voluntad, por eso se dice que si el alma esta apasionada en alguna afección lo está la voluntad; y así es la verdad, porque desta manera se cautiva la voluntad y pierde su libertad, de manera que la lleva tras sí el ímpetu y fuerza de la pasión: y por eso podemos decir que esta inflamación de amor es en la voluntad, esto es, inflama el apetito de la voluntad; y así ésta antes se llama, como decimos, pasión de amor que obra libre de la voluntad. Y porque la pasión receptiva del entendimiento solo puede recibir la inteligencia desnuda y pasivamente (y esto no puede sin estar purgado), por eso antes que lo esté, siente el alma menos veces el toque de inteligencia que el de la pasión de amor. Porque para esto no es menester que la voluntad esté: tan purgada acerca de las pasiones, pues que aun las pasiones le ayudan á sentir amor apasionado.

6. Bk. I. Ch. XI. §2.

7. Ch. V. §7.

8. St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, vii. M. iv. 19.

9. *Luke* 7:37.

10. Porque no le hurtasen sus discípulos.

11. *John* 20:15.

12. Y que también todos andan en aquello.

13. *Cant.* 3:2, 5:8.

14. *Gen.* 30:1.

15. Ch. IX. §1.

16. *Ps.* 102:5.

17. *Eph.* 4:24.

1. *Cant.* 8:1.

2. *Matt.* 10:36.

3. Y se hayan pasivameme.

4. Para que ella sin ser notada, esto es, sin ser impedida de estas afecciones, etc. (por quedar ellas adormidas y mortificadas en esta noche en que las dejaron á oscuras, para que no pudiesen notar in sentir á su modo bajo y natural, y así impidiesen al alma el salir de sí y de la casa de su sensualidad) llegase a la unión espiritual de perfecto amor de Dios.

1. Ch. V. §8.

2. Ch. XXI.

1. Ch. III.

2. É inútiles.

3. *Hos.* 13:9.

4. Que entonces conviene.

5. Y muy naturales.

6. Muy á su modo.

7. Que es humano y bajo.

8. Divina y espiritualmente, sino humana y naturalmente, como gustan las demás cosas, porque los bienes no van del hombre á Dios, sino vienen de Dios al hombre.

9. *Living Flame*, iii. 85.

10. *Ps.* 17:12.

11. *Acts* 22:11: "I did not see for the brightness of that light."

12. *Ps.* 17:13.

13. *Is.* 5:30.

14. Donde con tan peligro se vive y con tanta dificultad la verdad se conoce.

15. §1.

16. *Ps.* 30:21, 22.

17. Bk. I. Ch. XI. §3, and Ch. XI. *supr.*

1. Es á saber, ser secreta y ser escala.

2. Ch. V. §1.

3. [St. Thom. 2da 2dae qu. 180, art. 1. Et propter hoc Gregorius—Hom. 14 in Ezech. ante med—constituit vitam contemplativam in charitate Dei . . . ideo vita contemplativa terminatur ad delectationem, quae est in affectu, ex qua etiam amor intenditur.]

4. *Cant.* 6:11.

5. Donde no puede llegar el demonio, ni el sentido natural, ni el entendimiento.

6. *Jer.* 1:6.

7. *Exod.* 4:10.

8. *Acts* 7:32.

9. Pero ni aun con la imaginación interior no se atrevió á considerar, pareciendole que la imaginación estaba muy lejos y muda no sólo para formar algo de aquello que entendia en Dios, pero ni aun capacidad para recibir algo de ello. De donde por cuanto la sabiduría de esta conreemplación es lenguaje de Dios al alma de puro espíritu á espíritu puro, todo lo que es menos que espíritu como son los sentidos, no lo percibén, y así les es secreto y no lo saben ni pueden decir, ni tienen gana porque no le ven.

10. Humanamente.

11. Cosas y perfecciones divinas.

12. *Baruch* 3:31.

13. *Ps.* 76:19, 20.
14. *Job* 37:16.
  1. *Ps.* 83:6, 7, 8.
  2. *Luke* 14:11.
  3. *Prov.* 18:12.
  4. Lo cual hablando ahora naturalmente echará bien de ver el alma, etc.
  5. *Gen.* 28:12, 13.
  6. St. Thom. de dilectione Dei et Proximi, cap. xxvii. Ut dicit Bernardus, magna res est amor, sed sunt in eo gradus. Loquendo ergo aliquantulum magis moraliter quam realiter decern amoris gradus distinguere possumus, per quos contingit a statu viæ ad statum patriæ scandere ordinate, quos gradus cognosces per actus.
    1. *Cant.* 5:8.
    2. En esta enfermedad.
    3. *Ps.* 142:7.
    4. *Ps.* 118:81.
    5. Y accidente de la vida pasada.
    6. *Ps.* 67:10.
    7. Bk. I. Ch. XI.
    8. Á subir al segundo grado.
    9. *Cant.* 3:1, 2.
10. *Ps.* 104:4.
11. *Cant.* 3:4.
12. *John* 20:14.
13. Bk. II. Ch. XI. §7.
14. *Spiritual Canticle*, xiii.
15. *Ps.* 111:1.
16. *Gen.* 29:20.
17. Sermon. LXX. de Verb. Evan. Matth. Opp. tom. v. p. 383. Lib. de Viduitate, Cap. 21, Tom. vi. p. 384. Ed. Ben.
18. *Cant.* 8:6.
19. Porque ve claro que hartas le tiene hechos.
20. *Jer.* 2:2.
21. *Ps.* 83:2.
22. *Gen.* 30:1.
23. *Ps.* 58:7.
24. Padecen aqui hambre como canes y cercan y rodean la ciudad de Dios. En esre hambriento grado, etc.
  1. Y dar muchos toques en él.
  2. *Is.* 40:31.
  3. *Ps.* 41:1.
  4. *Ps.* 58:5.
  5. *Ibid.* 118:32.
  6. *1 Cor.* 13:7.
  7. *Exod.* 32:31, 32.
  8. *Ps.* 36:4.
  9. *Cant.* 1:1.
10. *Esth.* 5:2; 8:4.
11. *Cant.* 3:4.
12. *Dan.* 10:11.
13. Hom. 30, in Evang.
14. *Spiritual Canticle*, xiv.
15. Inmediatamente.
16. Porque éstos (que son pocos) por cuanro ya por el amor están purgadsimos, no entran en el Purgatorio.
17. *Matt.* 5:8.
18. *1 John* 3:2.
19. No porque el alma se hará tan capaz como Dios, porque eso es imposible, sino porque todo lo que ella es, etc.
20. Ch. XVIII. §4.
21. *John* 16:23.
  1. *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, Bk. II. Ch. I. §3.
  2. Más que con las demás virtudes.
  3. *1 Pet.* 5:9.
  4. *Heb.* 11:6.
  5. Es imposible dejarle de agradar.
  6. *Hos.* 2:20.
  7. Ch. VII. §4.
  8. *Ps.* 16:4.
  9. Una almilla de verde.
10. *1 Thess.* 5:8.
11. *Ps.* 24:15.
12. *Ps.* 122:2.
13. *Cant.* 4:9.
14. Ch. VIII. §1.
15. *Cant.* 1:4. Off. B. M. V. ant. ad Vesp.
16. *Cant.* 3:10.
17. *Rom.* 8:24.
  1. *Phil.* 3:20.

1. St. Teresa, *Interior Castle*, v. M. i. 6.
2. *Matt.* 6:3.
3. St. Teresa, l. c.
4. Y sin ella hacer nada de su parte.
5. *Cant.* 3:7, 8.
6. *Cant.* 4:10, 11.
7. El demonio echa de ver algunas mercedes que Dios quiere hacer á el alma; porque las que son por medio del angel bueno ordinariamente permite Dios.
8. Lo cual sería si no le dejase Dios lugar.
9. Donde nos conviene notar que esta es la causa porqué á la misma medida y modo que va Dios llevando al alma y habiendose con ella.
10. Que ordinariamente son por este medio aunque se muestre Cristo, porque él en su misma persona casi nunca aparece.

This point has been much discussed by writers on mystical theology. St. Teresa is of the same opinion as St. John of the Cross. See *Rel.* iv. 4.
11. *Exod.* 7:11, 22; 8:6, 7. Que si él sacaba nanas, también ellos las sacaban; si él volvía el agua en sangre, ellos también la volvían.
12. *Job* 41:25.
13. St. Teresa, *Life*, xxvii. 4.
14. . . . para impugnar y destruir espiritual con espiritual. Cuando esto acaece así al tiempo que el ángel bueno va á comunicar al alma la espiritual contemplación, no puede el alma ponerse tan presto en lo escondido y celado de la contemplación, que no sea notada del demonio y la alcance de vista con algún horror, etc.
15. Otras veces prevalece el demonio y comprehende al alma la turbación y horror, lo cual es al alma de mayor pena que ningún tormento de esta vida le podía ser, porque como esta horrenda comunicación va de espíritu a espíritu algo desnuda y claramente de todo lo que es cuerpo, es penosa sobre todo sentido. Y dura esto algún tanto en el espíritu, no mucho, porque saldría de las carnes con la vehemente comunicación del otro espíritu. Después queda la memoria, que aquí basta para dar gran pena.
16. El ángel bueno.
17. Pero sutilizóle mucho el espíritu para poder recibir este bien, el antecedente horror del espíritu malo; porque estas visiones espirituales más son de la otra vida que de ésta, y cuando se ve una, dispone para otra.

P. Gerardo remarks that something seems to be left out, but he has been unable to find the missing passage.
18. §8.
19. St. Teresa, *Conceptions*, iv. 6.
20. *Cant.* 1:1.
21. *Cant.* 8:1.
22. Esto es, enjugando y apagando los pechos de los apetitos y afecciones de la parte sensitiva.
23. En la sustancia del alma de la amorosa sustancia de Dios.
24. Como largamente habemos dicho atrás, y decimos acerca de este verso.
  1. Bk. I. Ch. VIII. §1; Bk. II. Ch. I. §1.
  2. Ch. XIV. §1.
  3. Ch. XXIII. §11.
  4. *Wisd.* 18:14.
  5. *Cant.* 3:4.
  6. *Cant.* 3:1.



# A SPIRITUAL CANTICLE OF THE SOUL

AND

## THE BRIDEGROOM CHRIST

BY

ST. JOHN OF THE CROSS

TRANSLATED BY

DAVID LEWIS

WITH CORRECTIONS AND AN INTRODUCTION

BY

BENEDICT ZIMMERMAN, O.C.D.

*Prior of St. Luke's, Wincanton*

June 28, 1909

Scanned and Edited by Harry Plantinga, 1993

Language has been modernized in the electronic edition  
by the elimination of the archaic singular case.

This electronic text is in the public domain.



## INTRODUCTION

THE present volume of the works of St. John of the Cross contains the explanation of the “Spiritual Canticle of the Soul and the Bridegroom Christ.” The two earlier works, the “Ascent of Mount Carmel” and the “Dark Night of the Soul,” dealt with the cleansing of the soul, the unremittant war against even the smallest imperfections standing in the way of union with God; imperfections which must be removed, partly by strict self-discipline, partly by the direct intervention of God, Who, searching “the reins and hearts” by means of heavy interior and exterior trials, purges away whatever is displeasing to Him. Although some stanzas refer to this preliminary state, the chief object of the “Spiritual Canticle” is to picture under the Biblical simile of Espousals and Matrimony the blessedness of a soul that has arrived at union with God.

The Canticle was composed during the long imprisonment St. John underwent at Toledo from the beginning of December 1577 till the middle of August of the following year. Being one of the principal supporters of the Reform of St. Teresa, he was also one of the victims of the war waged against her work by the Superiors of the old branch of the Order. St. John’s prison was a narrow, stifling cell, with no window, but only a small loophole through which a ray of light entered for a short time of the day, just long enough to enable him to say his office, but affording little facility for reading or writing. However, St. John stood in no need of books. Having for many years meditated on every word of Holy Scripture, the Word of God was deeply written in his heart, supplying abundant food for conversation with God during the whole period of his imprisonment. From time to time he poured forth his soul in poetry; afterwards he communicated his verses to friends.

One of these poetical works, the fruit of his imprisonment, was the “Spiritual Canticle,” which, as the reader will notice, is an abridged paraphrase of the Canticle of Canticles, the Song of Solomon, wherein under the image of passionate love are described the mystical sufferings and longings of a soul enamored with God.

From the earliest times the Fathers and Doctors of the Church had recognized the mystical character of the Canticle, and the Church had largely utilized it in her liturgy. But as there is nothing so holy but that it may be abused, the Canticle almost more than any other portion of Holy Scripture, had been misinterpreted by a false Mysticism, such as was rampant in the middle of the sixteenth century. It had come to pass, said the learned and saintly Augustinian, Fray Luis de Leon, that that which was given as a medicine was turned into poison,<sup>1</sup> so that the Ecclesiastical authority, by the Index of 1559, forbade the circulation of the Bible or parts of the Bible in any but the original languages, Hebrew, Greek, and Latin; and no one knew better than Luis de Leon himself how rigorously these rules were enforced, for he had to expiate by nearly five years’ imprisonment the audacity of having translated into Castilian the Canticle of Canticles.<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> ‘Los nombres de Cristo.’ Introduction.

<sup>2</sup> This exceptionally severe legislation, justified by the dangers of the time, only held good for

Again, one of the confessors of St. Teresa, commonly thought to have been the Dominican, Fray Diego de Yanguas, on learning that the Saint had written a book on the Cantic, ordered her to throw it into the fire, so that we now only possess a few fragments of her work, which, unknown to St. Teresa, had been copied by a nun.

It will now be understood that St. John's poetical paraphrase of the Cantic must have been welcome to many contemplative souls who desired to kindle their devotion with the words of Solomon, but were unable to read them in Latin. Yet the text alone, without explanation, would have helped them little; and as no one was better qualified than the author to throw light on the mysteries hidden under oriental imagery, the Venerable Ann of Jesus, Prioress of the Carmelite convent at Granada, requested St. John to write a commentary on his verses.<sup>1</sup> He at first excused himself, saying that he was no longer in that state of spiritual exuberance in which he had been when composing the Cantic, and that there only remained to him a confused recollection of the wonderful operations of Divine grace during the period of his imprisonment. Ann of Jesus was not satisfied with this answer; she not only knew that St. John had lost nothing of his fervor, though he might no longer experience the same feelings, but she remembered what had happened to St. Teresa under similar circumstances, and believed the same thing might happen to St. John. When St. Teresa was obliged to write on some mystical phenomena, the nature of which she did not fully understand, or whose effect she had forgotten, God granted her unexpectedly a repetition of her former experiences so as to enable her to fully study the matter and report on it.<sup>2</sup> Venerable Ann of Jesus felt sure that if St. John undertook to write an explanation of the Cantic he would soon find himself in the same mental attitude as when he composed it.

St. John at last consented, and wrote the work now before us. The following letter, which has lately come to light, gives some valuable information of its composition. The writer, Magdalen of the Holy Spirit, nun of Veas, where she was professed on August 6, 1577, was intimately acquainted with the Saint.

"When the holy father escaped from prison, he took with him a book of poetry he had written while there, containing the verses commencing 'In the beginning was the Word,' and those others: 'I know the fountain well which flows and runs,

---

Spain and the Spanish colonies, and has long since been revised. It did not include the Epistles and Gospels, Psalms, Passion, and other parts of the daily service.

<sup>1</sup> Ann de Lobera, born at Medina del Campo, November 25, 1545, was a deaf-mute until her eighth year. When she applied for admission to the Carmelite convent at Avila St. Teresa promised to receive her not so much as a novice, but as her companion and future successor; she took the habit August 1, 1570, and made her profession at Salamanca, October 21, 1571. She became the first prioress of Veas, and was entrusted by St. Teresa with the foundation of Granada (January 1582), where she found St. John of the Cross, who was prior of the convent of The Martyrs (well known to visitors of the Alhambra although no longer a convent). St. John not only became the director and confessor of the convent of nuns, but remained the most faithful helper and the staunchest friend of Mother Ann throughout the heavy trials which marred many years of her life. In 1604 she went to Paris, to found the first convent of her Order in France, and in 1607 she proceeded to Brussels, where she remained until her death, March 4, 1621, The heroic nature of her virtues having been acknowledged, she was declared 'Venerable' in 1878, and it is hoped that she will soon be beatified.

<sup>2</sup> See 'Life of St. Teresa': ed. Baker (London, 1904), ch. xiv. 12, xvi. 2, xviii. 10.

though it is night,' and the canticle, 'Where have you hidden yourself?' as far as 'O nymphs of Judea' (stanza XVIII.). The remaining verses he composed later on while rector of the college of Baeza (1579—81), while some of the explanations were written at Veas at the request of the nuns, and others at Granada. The Saint wrote this book in prison and afterwards left it at Veas, where it was handed to me to make some copies of it. Later on it was taken away from my cell, and I never knew who took it. I was much struck with the vividness and the beauty and subtlety of the words. One day I asked the Saint whether God had given him these words which so admirably explain those mysteries, and He answered: 'Child, sometimes God gave them to me, and at other times I sought them myself.'"<sup>1</sup>

The autograph of St. John's work which is preserved at Jaén bears the following title:

"Explanation of Stanzas treating of the exercise of love between the soul and Jesus Christ its Spouse, dealing with and commenting on certain points and effects of prayer; written at the request of Mother Ann of Jesus, prioress of the Discalced Carmelite nuns of St. Joseph's convent, Granada, 1584."

As might be expected, the author dedicated the book to Ann of Jesus, at whose request he had written it. Thus, he began his Prologue with the following words: "Inasmuch as this canticle, *Reverend Mother (Religiosa Madre)*, seems to have been written," etc. A little further on he said: "The stanzas that follow, having been written under the influence of that love which proceeds from the overflowing mystical intelligence, cannot be fully explained. Indeed, I do not purpose any such thing, for my sole purpose is to throw some general light over them, *since Your Reverence has asked me to do so*, and since this, in my opinion too, is the better course." And again: "I shall, however, pass over the more ordinary (effects of prayer), and treat briefly of the more extraordinary to which they are subject who, by the mercy of God, have advanced beyond the state of beginners. This I do for two reasons: the first is that much is already written concerning beginners; and the second is that I am addressing myself *to Your Reverence at your own bidding*; for you have received from Our Lord the grace of being led on from the elementary state and led inwards to the bosom of His divine love." He continues thus: "I therefore trust, though I may discuss some points of scholastic theology relating to the interior commerce of the soul with God, that I am not using such language altogether in vain, and that it will be found profitable for pure spirituality. For though *Your Reverence is ignorant of scholastic theology*, you are by no means ignorant of mystical theology, the science of love, etc."

From these passages it appears quite clearly that the Saint wrote the book for Venerable Ann of Jesus and the nuns of her convent. With the exception of an edition published at Brussels in 1627, these personal allusions have disappeared from both the Spanish text and the translations,<sup>2</sup> nor are they to be found in Mr. Lewis's version. There cannot be the least doubt that they represent St. John's own intention, for they are to be found in his original manuscript. This, containing, in several parts, besides the Explanation of the Spiritual Canticle, various poems by the Saint, was given by him to Ann of Jesus, who in her turn

<sup>1</sup> 'Manuel Serrano y Sanz,' *Apuntos para una Biblioteca de Escritores españoles*. (1903, p. 399).

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Berthold-Ignace de Sainte Anne, 'Vie de la Mère Anne de Jésus' (Malines, 1876), I. 343 ff.

committed it to the care of one of her nuns, Isabelle of the Incarnation, who took it with her to Baeza, where she remained eleven years, and afterwards to Jaén, where she founded a convent of which she became the first prioress. She there caused the precious manuscript to be bound in red velvet with silver clasps and gilt edges. It still was there in 1876, and, for all we know, remains to the present day in the keeping of the said convent. It is a pity that no photographic edition of the writings of St. John (so far as the originals are preserved) has yet been attempted, for there is need for a critical edition of his works.

The following is the division of the work: Stanzas I. to IV. are introductory; V. to XII. refer to the contemplative life in its earlier stages; XIII. to XXI., dealing with what the Saint calls the Espousals, appertain to the Unitive way, where the soul is frequently, but not habitually, admitted to a transient union with God; and XXII. to the end describe what he calls Matrimony, the highest perfection a soul can attain this side of the grave. The reader will find an epitome of the whole system of mystical theology in the explanation of Stanza XXVI.

This work differs in many respects from the “Ascent” and the “Dark Night.” Whereas these are strictly systematic, preceding on the line of relentless logic, the “Spiritual Canticle,” as a poetical work ought to do, soars high above the divisions and distinctions of the scholastic method. With a boldness akin to that of his Patron Saint, the Evangelist, St. John rises to the highest heights, touching on a subject that should only be handled by a Saint, and which the reader, were he a Saint himself, will do well to treat cautiously: the partaking by the human soul of the Divine Nature, or, as St. John calls it, the Deification of the soul (Stanza XXVI. *sqq.*). These are regions where the ordinary mind threatens to turn; but St. John, with the knowledge of what he himself had experienced, not once but many times, what he had observed in others, and what, above all, he had read of in Holy Scripture, does not shrink from lifting the veil more completely than probably any Catholic writer on mystical theology has done. To pass in silence the last wonders of God’s love for fear of being misunderstood, would have been tantamount to ignoring the very end for which souls are led along the way of perfection; to reveal these mysteries in human language, and say all that can be said with not a word too much, not an uncertain or misleading line in the picture: this could only have been accomplished by one whom the Church has already declared to have been taught by God Himself (*divinitus instructus*), and whose books She tells us are filled with heavenly wisdom (*coelesti sapientia refertos*). It is hoped that sooner or later She will proclaim him (what many grave authorities think him to be) a Doctor of the Church, namely, the Doctor of Mystical theology.<sup>1</sup>

As has already been noticed in the Introduction to the “Ascent,” the whole of the teaching of St. John is directly derived from Holy Scripture and from the psychological principles of St. Thomas Aquinas. There is no trace to be found of an influence of the Mystics of the Middle Age, with whose writings St. John does not appear to have been acquainted. But throughout this treatise there are many obvious allusions to the writings of St. Teresa, nor will the reader fail to notice the encouraging remark about the publication of her works (stanza xiii, sect. 8). The fact is that the same Venerable Ann of Jesus who was responsible for the composition of St. John’s treatise was at the same time making preparations for

---

<sup>1</sup> On this subject see Fray Eulogio de San José, ‘Doctorado de Santa Teresa de Jesús y de San Juan de la Cruz.’ Córdoba, 1896.

the edition of St. Teresa's works which a few years later appeared at Salamanca under the editorship of Fray Luis de Leon, already mentioned.

Those of his readers who have been struck with, not to say frightened by, the exactions of St. John in the "Ascent" and the "Dark Night," where he demands complete renunciation of every kind of satisfaction and pleasure, however legitimate in themselves, and an entire mortification of the senses as well as the faculties and powers of the soul, and who have been wondering at his self-abnegation which caused him not only to accept, but even to court contempt, will find here the clue to this almost inhuman attitude. In his response to the question of Our Lord, "What shall I give you for all you have done and suffered for Me?" "Lord, to suffer and be despised for You"—he was not animated by grim misanthropy or stoic indifference, but he had learned that in proportion as the human heart is emptied of Self, after having been emptied of all created things, it is open to the influx of Divine grace. This he fully proves in the "Spiritual Canticle." To be made "partaker of the Divine Nature," as St. Peter says, human nature must undergo a radical transformation. Those who earnestly study the teaching of St. John in his earlier treatises and endeavor to put his recommendations into practice, will see in this and the next volume an unexpected perspective opening before their eyes, and they will begin to understand how it is that the sufferings of this time—whether voluntary or involuntary—are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come that shall be revealed in us.

Mr. Lewis's masterly translation of the works of St. John of the Cross appeared in 1864 under the auspices of Cardinal Wiseman. In the second edition, of 1889, he made numerous changes, without, however, leaving a record of the principles that guided him. Sometimes, indeed, the revised edition is terser than the first, but just as often the old one seems clearer. It is more difficult to understand the reasons that led him to alter very extensively the text of quotations from Holy Scripture. In the first edition he had nearly always strictly adhered to the Douay version, which is the one in official use in the Catholic Church in English-speaking countries. It may not always be as perfect as one would wish it to be, but it must be acknowledged that the wholesale alteration in Mr. Lewis's second edition is, to say the least, puzzling. Even the Stanzas have undergone many changes in the second edition, and it will be noticed that there are some variants in their text as set forth at the beginning of the book, and as repeated at the heading of each chapter.

The present edition, allowing for some slight corrections, is a reprint of that of 1889.

BENEDICT ZIMMERMAN, PRIOR, O.C.D.

ST. LUKES, WINCANTON, SOMERSET,  
Feast of St. Simon Stock,  
May 16, 1909.





# A SPIRITUAL CANTICLE OF THE SOUL AND THE BRIDEGROOM CHRIST<sup>1</sup>

## PROLOGUE

INASMUCH as this canticle seems to have been written with some fervor of love of God, whose wisdom and love are, as is said in the book of Wisdom,<sup>2</sup> so vast that they reach “from end to end,” and as the soul, taught and moved by Him, manifests the same abundance and strength in the words it uses, I do not purpose here to set forth all that greatness and fullness the spirit of love, which is fruitful, embodies in it. Yes, rather it would be foolishness to think that the language of love and the mystical intelligence—and that is what these stanzas are—can be at all explained in words of any kind, for the Spirit of our Lord who helps our weakness—as St. Paul says<sup>3</sup>—dwelling in us makes petitions for us with groaning unutterable for that which we cannot well understand or grasp so as to be able to make it known. “The Spirit helps our infirmity . . . the Spirit Himself requests for us with groanings unspeakable.” For who can describe that which He shows to loving souls in whom He dwells? Who can set forth in words that which He makes them feel? and, lastly, who can explain that for which they long?

2. Assuredly no one can do it; not even they themselves who experience it. That is the reason why they use figures of special comparisons and similitudes; they hide somewhat of that which they feel and in the abundance of the Spirit utter secret mysteries rather than express themselves in clear words.

3. And if these similitudes are not received in the simplicity of a loving mind, and in the sense in which they are uttered, they will seem to be effusions of folly rather than the language of reason; as anyone may see in the divine Canticle of Solomon, and in others of the sacred books, wherein the Holy Spirit, because ordinary and common speech could not convey His meaning, uttered His mysteries in strange terms and similitudes. It follows from this, that after all that the holy doctors have said, and may say, no words of theirs can explain it; nor can words do it; and so, in general, all that is said falls far short of the meaning.

4. The stanzas that follow having been written under influence of that love which proceeds from the overflowing mystical intelligence, cannot be fully explained. Indeed I do not purpose any such thing, for my sole object is to throw some general light over them, which in my opinion is the better course. It is better to leave the outpourings of love in their own fullness, that everyone may apply them according to the measure of his spirit and power, than to pare them down to one particular sense which is not suited to the taste of everyone. And though I do put

---

<sup>1</sup> [This canticle was made by the Saint when he was in the prison of the Mitigation, in Toledo. It came into the hands of the Venerable Anne of Jesus, at whose request he wrote the following commentary on it, and addressed it to her.]

<sup>2</sup> Wisdom 8:1

<sup>3</sup> Rom. 8:26

forth a particular explanation, still others are not to be bound by it. The mystical wisdom—that is, the love, of which these stanzas speak—does not require to be distinctly understood in order to produce the effect of love and tenderness in the soul, for it is in this respect like faith, by which we love God without a clear comprehension of Him.

5. I shall therefore be very concise, though now and then unable to avoid some prolixity where the subject requires it, and when the opportunity is offered of discussing and explaining certain points and effects of prayer: many of which being referred to in these stanzas, I must discuss some of them. I shall, however, pass over the more ordinary ones, and treat briefly of the more extraordinary to which they are subject who, by the mercy of God, have advanced beyond the state of beginners. This I do for two reasons: the first is, that much is already written concerning beginners; and the second is, that I am addressing those who have received from our Lord the grace of being led on from the elementary state and are led inwards to the bosom of His divine love.

6. I therefore trust, though I may discuss some points of scholastic theology relating to the interior commerce of the soul with God, that I am not using such language altogether in vain, and that it will be found profitable for pure spirituality. For though some may be altogether ignorant of scholastic theology by which the divine verities are explained, yet they are not ignorant of mystical theology, the science of love, by which those verities are not only learned, but at the same time are relished also.

7. And in order that what I am going to say may be the better received, I submit myself to higher judgments, and unreservedly to that of our holy mother the Church, intending to say nothing in reliance on my own personal experience, or on what I have observed in other spiritual persons, nor on what I have heard them say—though I intend to profit by all this—unless I can confirm it with the sanction of the divine writings, at least on those points which are most difficult of comprehension.

8. The method I propose to follow in the matter is this: first of all, to cite the words of the text and then to give that explanation of them which belongs to the subject before me. I shall now transcribe all the stanzas and place them at the beginning of this treatise. In the next place, I shall take each of them separately, and explain them line by line, each line in its proper place before the explanation.

## SONG OF THE SOUL AND THE BRIDEGROOM

### I

#### THE BRIDE

*Where have You hidden Yourself,  
And abandoned me in my groaning, O my Beloved?  
You have fled like the hart,  
Having wounded me.  
I ran after You, crying; but You were gone.*

### II

*O shepherds, you who go  
Through the shepcots up the hill,  
If you shall see Him  
Whom I love the most,  
Tell Him I languish, suffer, and die.*

### III

*In search of my Love  
I will go over mountains and strands;  
I will gather no flowers,  
I will fear no wild beasts;  
And pass by the mighty and the frontiers.*

### IV

*O groves and thickets  
Planted by the hand of the Beloved;  
O verdant meads  
Enameled with flowers,  
Tell me, has He passed by you?*

### V

#### ANSWER OF THE CREATURES

*A thousand graces diffusing  
He passed through the groves in haste,  
And merely regarding them  
As He passed  
Clothed them with His beauty.*

### VI

#### THE BRIDE

*Oh! who can heal me?  
Give me at once Yourself,  
Send me no more  
A messenger  
Who cannot tell me what I wish.*

## VII

*All they who serve are telling me  
Of Your unnumbered graces;  
And all wound me more and more,  
And something leaves me dying,  
I know not what, of which they are darkly speaking.*

## VIII

*But how you persevere, O life,  
Not living where you live;  
The arrows bring death  
Which you receive  
From your conceptions of the Beloved.*

## IX

*Why, after wounding  
This heart, have You not healed it?  
And why, after stealing it,  
Have You thus abandoned it,  
And not carried away the stolen prey?*

## X

*Quench my troubles,  
For no one else can soothe them;  
And let my eyes behold You,  
For You are their light,  
And I will keep them for You alone.*

## XI

*Reveal Your presence,  
And let the vision and Your beauty kill me,  
Behold the malady  
Of love is incurable  
Except in Your presence and before Your face.*

## XII

*O crystal well!  
Oh that on Your silvered surface  
You would mirror forth at once  
Those eyes desired*

*Which are outlined in my heart!*

XIII

*Turn them away, O my Beloved!  
I am on the wing:*

THE BRIDEGROOM

*Return, My Dove!  
The wounded hart  
Looms on the hill  
In the air of your flight and is refreshed.*

XIV

*My Beloved is the mountains,  
The solitary wooded valleys,  
The strange islands,  
The roaring torrents,  
The whisper of the amorous gales;*

XV

*The tranquil night  
At the approaches of the dawn,  
The silent music,  
The murmuring solitude,  
The supper which revives, and enkindles love.*

XVI

*Catch us the foxes,  
For our vineyard has flourished;  
While of roses  
We make a nosegay,  
And let no one appear on the hill.*

XVII

*O killing north wind, cease!  
Come, south wind, that awakens love!  
Blow through my garden,  
And let its odors flow,  
And the Beloved shall feed among the flowers.*

XVIII

*O nymphs of Judea!  
While amid the flowers and the rose-trees  
The amber sends forth its perfume,*

*Tarry in the suburbs,  
And touch not our thresholds.*

## XIX

*Hide yourself, O my Beloved!  
Turn Your face to the mountains,  
Do not speak,  
But regard the companions  
Of her who is traveling amidst strange islands.*

## XX

## THE BRIDEGROOM

*Light-winged birds,  
Lions, fawns, bounding does,  
Mountains, valleys, strands,  
Waters, winds, heat,  
And the terrors that keep watch by night;*

## XXI

*By the soft lyres  
And the siren strains, I adjure you,  
Let your fury cease,  
And touch not the wall,  
That the bride may sleep in greater security.*

## XXII

*The bride has entered  
The pleasant and desirable garden,  
And there reposes to her heart's content;  
Her neck reclining  
On the sweet arms of the Beloved.*

## XXIII

*Beneath the apple-tree  
There were you betrothed;  
There I gave you My hand,  
And you were redeemed  
Where your mother was corrupted.*

## XXIV

## THE BRIDE

*Our bed is of flowers  
By dens of lions encompassed,  
Hung with purple,*

*Made in peace,  
And crowned with a thousand shields of gold.*

## XXV

*In Your footsteps  
The young ones run Your way;  
At the touch of the fire  
And by the spiced wine,  
The divine balsam flows.*

## XXVI

*In the inner cellar  
Of my Beloved have I drunk; and when I went forth  
Over all the plain  
I knew nothing,  
And lost the flock I followed before.*

## XXVII

*There He gave me His breasts,  
There He taught me the science full of sweetness.  
And there I gave to Him  
Myself without reserve;  
There I promised to be His bride.*

## XXVIII

*My soul is occupied,  
And all my substance in His service;  
Now I guard no flock,  
Nor have I any other employment:  
My sole occupation is love.*

## XXIX

*If, then, on the common land  
I am no longer seen or found,  
You will say that I am lost;  
That, being enamored,  
I lost myself; and yet was found.*

## XXX

*Of emeralds, and of flowers  
In the early morning gathered,  
We will make the garlands,  
Flowering in Your love,  
And bound together with one hair of my head.*

## XXXI

*By that one hair  
 You have observed fluttering on my neck,  
 And on my neck regarded,  
 You were captivated;  
 And wounded by one of my eyes.*

## XXXII

*When You regarded me,  
 Your eyes imprinted in me Your grace:  
 For this You loved me again,  
 And thereby my eyes merited  
 To adore what in You they saw*

## XXXIII

*Despise me not,  
 For if I was swarthy once  
 You can regard me now;  
 Since You have regarded me,  
 Grace and beauty have You given me.*

## XXXIV

## THE BRIDEGROOM

*The little white dove  
 Has returned to the ark with the bough;  
 And now the turtle-dove  
 Its desired mate  
 On the green banks has found.*

## XXXV

*In solitude she lived,  
 And in solitude built her nest;  
 And in solitude, alone  
 Has the Beloved guided her,  
 In solitude also wounded with love.*

## XXXVI

## THE BRIDE

*Let us rejoice, O my Beloved!  
 Let us go forth to see ourselves in Your beauty,  
 To the mountain and the hill,  
 Where the pure water flows:  
 Let us enter into the heart of the thicket.*

## XXXVII



*We shall go at once  
To the deep caverns of the rock  
Which are all secret,  
There we shall enter in  
And taste of the new wine of the pomegranate.*

## XXXVIII

*There you will show me  
That which my soul desired;  
And there You will give at once,  
O You, my life!  
That which You gave me the other day.*

## XXXIX

*The breathing of the air,  
The song of the sweet nightingale,  
The grove and its beauty  
In the serene night,  
With the flame that consumes, and gives no pains.*

## XL

*None saw it;  
Neither did Aminadab appear  
The siege was intermitted,  
And the cavalry dismounted  
At the sight of the waters.*

## ARGUMENT

THESE stanzas describe the career of a soul from its first entrance on the service of God till it comes to the final state of perfection—the spiritual marriage. They refer accordingly to the three states or ways of the spiritual training—the purgative, illuminative, and unitive ways, some properties and effects of which they explain.

The first stanzas relate to beginners—to the purgative way. The second to the advanced—to the state of spiritual betrothal; that is, the illuminative way. The next to the unitive way—that of the perfect, the spiritual Marriage. The unitive way, that of the perfect, follows the illuminative, which is that of the advanced.

The last stanzas treat of the beatific state, which only the already perfect soul aims at.

## EXPLANATION OF THE STANZAS

### NOTE

THE soul, considering the obligations of its state, seeing that “the days of man are short;”<sup>1</sup> that the way of eternal life is straight;<sup>2</sup> that “the just man shall scarcely be saved;”<sup>3</sup> that the things of this world are empty and deceitful; that all die and perish like water poured on the ground;<sup>4</sup> that time is uncertain, the last account strict, perdition most easy, and salvation most difficult; and recognizing also, on the other hand, the great debt that is owing to God, Who has created it solely for Himself, for which the service of its whole life is due, Who has redeemed it for Himself alone, for which it owes Him all else, and the correspondence of its will to His love; and remembering other innumerable blessings for which it acknowledges itself indebted to God even before it was born: and also that a great part of its life has been wasted, and that it will have to render an account of it all from beginning to the end, to the payment of “the last farthing,”<sup>5</sup> when God shall “search Jerusalem with lamps;”<sup>6</sup> that it is already late, and perhaps the end of the day;<sup>7</sup> in order to remedy so great an evil, especially when it is conscious that God is grievously offended, and that He has hidden His face from it, because it would forget Him for the creature,—the soul, now touched with sorrow and inward sinking of the heart at the sight of its imminent risks and ruin, renouncing everything and casting them aside without delaying for a day, or even an hour, with fear and groanings uttered from the heart, and wounded with the love of God, begins to invoke the Beloved and says:

---

<sup>1</sup> Job 14:5

<sup>2</sup> Matt. 7:14

<sup>3</sup> 1 Pet. 4:18

<sup>4</sup> 2 Kings 14:14

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 5:26

<sup>6</sup> Sophon, 1. 12.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. 20:6

## STANZA I

### THE BRIDE

*Where have You hidden Yourself,  
And abandoned me to my sorrow, O my Beloved!  
You have fled like the hart,  
Having wounded me.  
I ran after You, crying; but You were gone.*

IN this first stanza the soul, enamored of the Word, the Son of God, the Bridegroom, desiring to be united to Him in the clear and substantial vision, sets before Him the anxieties of its love, complaining of His absence. And this the more so because, now pierced and wounded with love, for which it had abandoned all things, even itself, it has still to endure the absence of the Beloved, Who has not released it from its mortal flesh, that it might have the fruition of Him in the glory of eternity. Hence it cries out,

*“Where have You hidden Yourself?”*

2. It is as if the soul said, “Show me, O You the Word, my Bridegroom, the place where You are hidden.” It asks for the revelation of the divine Essence; for the place where the Son of God is hidden is, according to St. John, “the bosom of the Father,”<sup>1</sup> which is the divine Essence, transcending all mortal vision, and hidden from all human understanding, as Isaiah says, speaking to God, “Verily You are a hidden God.”<sup>2</sup> From this we learn that the communication and sense of His presence, however great they may be, and the most sublime and profound knowledge of God which the soul may have in this life, are not God essentially, neither have they any affinity with Him, for in very truth He is still hidden from the soul; and it is therefore expedient for it, amid all these grandeurs, always to consider Him as hidden, and to seek Him in His hiding place, saying,

*“Where have You hidden Yourself?”*

3. Neither sublime communications nor sensible presence furnish any certain proof of His gracious presence; nor is the absence thereof, and aridity, any proof of His absence from the soul. “If He come to me, I shall not see Him; if He depart, I shall not understand.”<sup>3</sup> That is, if the soul have any great communication, or impression, or spiritual knowledge, it must not on that account persuade itself that what it then feels is to enjoy or see God clearly and in His Essence, or that it brings it nearer to Him, or Him to it, however deep such feelings may be. On the other hand, when all these sensible and spiritual communications fail it, and it is itself in dryness, darkness, and desolation, it must not on that account suppose that God is far from it; for in truth the former state is no sign of its being in a state of grace, nor is the latter a sign that it is not; for “man knows not whether he is

---

<sup>1</sup> John 1:18

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 45:15

<sup>3</sup> Job 9:11

worthy of love or hatred”<sup>1</sup> in the sight of God.

4. The chief object of the soul in these words is not to ask only for that affective and sensible devotion, wherein there is no certainty or evidence of the possession of the Bridegroom in this life; but principally for that clear presence and vision of His Essence, of which it longs to be assured and satisfied in the next. This, too, was the object of the bride who, in the divine song desiring to be united to the Divinity of the Bridegroom Word, prayed to the Father, saying, “Show me where You feed, where You lie in the midday.”<sup>2</sup> For to ask to be shown the place where He fed was to ask to be shown the Essence of the Divine Word, the Son; because the Father feeds nowhere else but in His only begotten Son, Who is the glory of the Father. In asking to be shown the place where He lies in the midday, was to ask for the same thing, because the Son is the sole delight of the Father, Who lies in no other place, and is comprehended by no other thing, but in and by His beloved Son, in Whom He reposes wholly, communicating to Him His whole Essence, in the “midday,” which is eternity, where the Father is ever begetting and the Son ever begotten.

5. This pasture, then, is the Bridegroom Word, where the Father feeds in infinite glory. He is also the bed of flowers whereupon He reposes with infinite delight of love, profoundly hidden from all mortal vision and every created thing. This is the meaning of the bride-soul when she says,

*“Where have You hidden Yourself?”*

6. That the thirsty soul may find the Bridegroom, and be one with Him in the union of love in this life—so far as that is possible—and quench its thirst with that drink which it is possible to drink of at His hands in this life, it will be as well—since that is what the Soul asks of Him—that we should answer for Him, and point out the special spot where He is hidden, that He may be found there in that perfection and sweetness of which this life is capable, and that the soul may not begin to loiter uselessly in the footsteps of its companions.

7. We must remember that the Word, the Son of God, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is hidden in essence and in presence, in the inmost being of the soul. That soul, therefore, that will find Him, must go out from all things in will and affection, and enter into the profoundest self-recollection, and all things must be to it as if they existed not. Hence, St. Augustine says: “I found You not without, O Lord; I sought You without in vain, for You are within,”<sup>3</sup> God is therefore hidden within the soul, and the true contemplative will seek Him there in love, saying,

*“Where have You hidden Yourself?”*

8. O you soul, then, most beautiful of creatures, who so long to know the place where your Beloved is, that you may seek Him, and be united to Him, you know now that you are yourself that very tabernacle where He dwells, the secret chamber of His retreat where He is hidden. Rejoice, therefore, and exult, because all your good and all your hope is so near you as to be within you; or, to speak

<sup>1</sup> Eccles. 9:1

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 1:6

<sup>3</sup> ‘Soliloq.,’ c. 31. Ed. Ben. tom. vi. app. p. 98.

more accurately, that you can not be without it, “for lo, the kingdom of God is within you.”<sup>1</sup> So says the Bridegroom Himself, and His servant, St. Paul, adds: “You are the temple of the living God.”<sup>2</sup> What joy for the soul to learn that God never abandons it, even in mortal sin; how much less in a state of grace!<sup>3</sup>

9. What more can you desire, what more can you seek without, seeing that within you have your riches, your delight, your satisfaction, your fullness and your kingdom; that is, your Beloved, Whom you desire and seek? Rejoice, then, and be glad in Him with interior recollection, seeing that you have Him so near. Then love Him, then desire Him, then adore Him, and go not to seek Him out of yourself, for that will be but distraction and weariness, and you shall not find Him; because there is no fruition of Him more certain, more ready, or more intimate than that which is within.

10. One difficulty alone remains: though He is within, yet He is hidden. But it is a great matter to know the place of His secret rest, that He may be sought there with certainty. The knowledge of this is that which you ask for here, O soul, when with loving affection you cry,

*“Where have You hidden Yourself?”*

11. You will still urge and say, How is it, then, that I find Him not, nor feel Him, if He is within my soul? It is because He is hidden, and because you hide not yourself also that you may find Him and feel Him; for he that will seek that which is hidden must enter secretly into the secret place where it is hidden, and when he finds it, he is himself hidden like the object of his search. Seeing, then, that the Bridegroom whom you love is “the treasure hidden in the field”<sup>4</sup> of your soul, for which the wise merchant gave all that he had, so you, if you will find Him, must forget all that is yours, withdraw from all created things, and hide yourself in the secret retreat of the spirit, shutting the door upon yourself—that is, denying your will in all things—and praying to your Father in secret.<sup>5</sup> Then you, being hidden with Him, will be conscious of His presence in secret, and will love Him, possess Him in secret, and delight in Him in secret, in a way that no tongue or language can express.

12. Courage, then, O soul most beautiful, you know now that your Beloved, Whom you desire, dwells hidden within your breast; strive, therefore, to be truly hidden with Him, and then you shall embrace Him, and be conscious of His presence with loving affection. Consider also that He bids you, by the mouth of Isaiah, to come to His secret hiding-place, saying, “Go, . . . enter into your chambers, shut your doors upon you”; that is, all your faculties, so that no created thing shall enter: “be hid a little for a moment,”<sup>6</sup> that is, for the moment of this mortal life; for if now during this life which is short, you will “with all watchfulness keep your heart,”<sup>7</sup> as the wise man says, God will most assuredly give you, as He has

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 17:21

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 6:16

<sup>3</sup> ‘Mt. Carmel,’ Bk. 2, c. 5. sect. 3.

<sup>4</sup> Matt. 13:44

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 6:6

<sup>6</sup> Isa. 26:20

<sup>7</sup> Prov. 4:23

promised by the prophet Isaiah, “hidden treasures and mysteries of secrets.”<sup>1</sup> The substance of these secrets is God Himself, for He is the substance of the faith, and the object of it, and the faith is the secret and the mystery. And when that which the faith conceals shall be revealed and made manifest, that is the perfection of God, as St. Paul says, “When that which is perfect is come,”<sup>2</sup> then shall be revealed to the soul the substance and mysteries of these secrets.

13. Though in this mortal life the soul will never reach to the interior secrets as it will in the next, however much it may hide itself, still, if it will hide itself with Moses, “in the hole of the rock”—which is a real imitation of the perfect life of the Bridegroom, the Son of God—protected by the right hand of God, it will merit the vision of the “back parts”;<sup>3</sup> that is, it will reach to such perfection here, as to be united, and transformed by love, in the Son of God, its Bridegroom. So effectually will this be wrought that the soul will feel itself so united to Him, so learned and so instructed in His secrets, that, so far as the knowledge of Him in this life is concerned, it will be no longer necessary for it to say: “Where have You hidden Yourself?”

14. You know then, O soul, how you are to demean yourself if you will find the Bridegroom in His secret place. But if you will hear it again, hear this one word full of substance and unapproachable truth: Seek Him in faith and love, without seeking to satisfy yourself in anything, or to understand more than is expedient for you to know; for faith and love are the two guides of the blind; they will lead you, by a way you know not, to the secret chamber of God. Faith, the secret of which I am speaking, is the foot that journeys onwards to God, and love is the guide that directs its steps. And while the soul meditates on the mysterious secrets of the faith, it will merit the revelation, on the part of love, of that which the faith involves, namely, the Bridegroom Whom it longs for, in this life by spiritual grace, and the divine union, as we said before,<sup>4</sup> and in the next in essential glory, face to face, hidden now.

15. But meanwhile, though the soul attains to union, the highest state possible in this life, yet inasmuch as He is still hidden from it in the bosom of the Father, as I have said, the soul longing for the fruition of Him in the life to come, ever cries, “Where have You hidden Yourself?”

16. You do well, then, O soul, in seeking Him always in His secret place; for you greatly magnify God, and draw near to Him, esteeming Him as far beyond and above all you can reach. Rest, therefore, neither wholly nor in part, on what your faculties can embrace; never seek to satisfy yourself with what you comprehend of God, but rather with what you comprehend not; and never rest on the love of, and delight in, that which you can understand and feel, but rather on that which is beyond your understanding and feeling: this is, as I have said, to seek Him by faith.

17. God is, as I said before,<sup>5</sup> inaccessible and hidden, and though it may seem that

---

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 45:3

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 13:10

<sup>3</sup> Exod. 33:22,23

<sup>4</sup> Sect. 4.

<sup>5</sup> Sect. 2.

you have found Him, felt Him, and comprehended Him, yet you must ever regard Him as hidden, serve Him as hidden, in secret. Do not be like many unwise, who, with low views of God, think that when they cannot comprehend Him, or be conscious of His presence, that He is then farther away and more hidden, when the contrary is true, namely, that He is nearer to them when they are least aware of it; as the prophet David says, "He put darkness His covert,"<sup>1</sup> Thus, when you are near to Him, the very infirmity of your vision makes the darkness palpable; you do well, therefore, at all times, in prosperity as well as in adversity, spiritual or temporal, to look upon God as hidden, and to say to Him, "Where have You hidden Yourself?

*And left me to my sorrow, O my Beloved?"*

18. The soul calls Him "my Beloved," the more to move Him to listen to its cry, for God, when loved, most readily listens to the prayer of him who loves Him. Thus He speaks Himself: "If you abide in Me . . . you shall ask whatever thing you will, and it shall be done to you."<sup>2</sup> The soul may then with truth call Him Beloved, when it is wholly His, when the heart has no attachments but Him, and when all the thoughts are continually directed to Him. It was the absence of this that made Delilah say to Samson, "How do you say you love me when your mind is not with me?"<sup>3</sup> The mind comprises the thoughts and the feelings. Some there are who call the Bridegroom their Beloved, but He is not really beloved, because their heart is not wholly with Him. Their prayers are, therefore, not so effectual before God, and they shall not obtain their petitions until, persevering in prayer, they fix their minds more constantly upon God and their hearts more wholly in loving affection upon Him, for nothing can be obtained from God but by love.

19. The words, "And left me to my sorrow," tell us that the absence of the Beloved is the cause of continual sadness in him who loves; for as such a one loves none else, so, in the absence of the object beloved, nothing can console or relieve him. This is, therefore, a test to discern the true lover of God. Is he satisfied with anything less than God? Do I say satisfied? Yes, if a man possess all things, he cannot be satisfied; the greater his possessions the less will be his satisfaction, for the satisfaction of the heart is not found in possessions, but in detachment from all things and in poverty of spirit. This being so, the perfection of love in which we possess God, by a grace most intimate and special, lives in the soul in this life when it has reached it, with a certain satisfaction, which however is not full, for David, notwithstanding all his perfection, hoped for that in heaven saying, "I shall be satisfied when Your glory shall appear."<sup>4</sup>

20. Thus, then, the peace and tranquillity and satisfaction of heart to which the soul may attain in this life are not sufficient to relieve it from its groaning, peaceful and painless though it be, while it hopes for that which is still wanting. Groaning belongs to hope, as the Apostle says of himself and others, though perfect, "Ourselves also, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption of the sons of God."<sup>5</sup> The soul

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 17:12

<sup>2</sup> John 15:7

<sup>3</sup> Judg. 16:15

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 16:15

<sup>5</sup> Rom. 8:23

groans when the heart is enamored, for where love wounds there is heard the groaning of the wounded one, complaining feelingly of the absence of the Beloved, especially when, after tasting of the sweet conversation of the Bridegroom, it finds itself suddenly alone, and in aridity, because He has gone away. That is why it cries,

*“You have fled like the hart.”*

21. Here it is to be observed that in the Canticle of Canticles the bride compares the Bridegroom to the roe and the hart on the mountains—“My Beloved is like a roe and to a fawn of harts”<sup>1</sup>—not only because He is shy, solitary, and avoids companions as the hart, but also for his sudden appearance and disappearance. That is His way in His visits to devout souls in order to comfort and encourage them, and in the withdrawing and absence which He makes them feel after those visits in order to try, humble, and teach them. For that purpose He makes them feel the pain of His absence most keenly, as the following words show:

*“Having wounded me.”*

22. It is as if it had said, “It was not enough that I should feel the pain and grief which Your absence causes, and from which I am continually suffering, but You must, after wounding me with the arrow of Your love, and increasing my longing and desire to see You, run away from me with the swiftness of the hart, and not permit me to lay hold of You, even for a moment.”

23. For the clearer understanding of this we are to keep in mind that, beside the many kinds of God’s visits to the soul, in which He wounds it with love, there are commonly certain secret touches of love, which, like a fiery arrow, pierce and penetrate the soul, and burn it with the fire of love. These are properly called the wounds of love, and it is of these the soul is here speaking. These wounds so inflame the will, that the soul becomes so enveloped with the fire of love as to appear consumed thereby. They make it go forth out of itself, and be renewed, and enter on another life, as the phoenix from the fire.

24. David, speaking of this, says, “My heart has been inflamed, and my reins have been changed; and I am brought to nothing, and I knew not.”<sup>2</sup> The desires and affections, called the reins by the prophet, are all stirred and divinely changed in this burning of the heart, and the soul, through love, melted into nothing, knowing nothing but love. At this time the changing of the reins is a great pain, and longing for the vision of God; it seems to the soul that God treats it with intolerable severity, so much so that the severity with which love treats it seems to the soul unendurable, not because it is wounded—for it considers such wounds to be its salvation—but because it is thus suffering from its love, and because He has not wounded it more deeply so as to cause death, that it may be united to Him in the life of perfect love. The soul, therefore, magnifying its sorrows, or revealing them, says,

*“Having wounded me.”*

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 2:9

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 72:21,22



25. The soul says in effect, “You have abandoned me after wounding me, and You have left me dying of love; and then You have hidden Yourself as a hart swiftly running away.” This impression is most profound in the soul; for by the wound of love, made in the soul by God, the affections of the will lead most rapidly to the possession of the Beloved, whose touch it felt, and as rapidly also, His absence, and its inability to have the fruition of Him here as it desires. Thereupon succeed the groaning because of His absence; for these visitations of God are not like those which recreate and satisfy the soul, because they are rather for wounding than for healing—more for afflicting than for satisfying it, seeing that they tend rather to quicken the knowledge, and increase the longing, and consequently pain with the longing for the vision of God. They are called the spiritual wounds of love, most sweet to the soul and desirable; and, therefore, when it is thus wounded the soul would willingly die a thousand deaths, because these wounds make it go forth out of itself, and enter into God, which is the meaning of the words that follow:

*“I ran after You, crying; but You were gone.”*

26. There can be no remedy for the wounds of love but from Him who inflicted them. And so the wounded soul, urged by the vehemence of that burning which the wounds of love occasion, runs after the Beloved, crying to Him for relief. This spiritual running after God has a two-fold meaning. The first is a going forth from all created things, which is effected by hating and despising them; the second, a going forth out of oneself, by forgetting self, which is brought about by the love of God. For when the love of God touches the soul with that vividness of which we are here speaking, it so elevates it, that it goes forth not only out of itself by self-forgetfulness, but it is also drawn away from its own judgment, natural ways and inclinations, crying after God, “O my Bridegroom,” as if saying, “By this touch of Yours and wound of love have You drawn me away not only from all created things, but also from myself—for, in truth, soul and body seem now to part—and raised me up to Yourself, crying after You in detachment from all things that I might be attached to You:

*“You were gone.”*

27. As if saying, “When I sought Your presence, I found You not; and I was detached from all things without being able to cling to You—borne painfully by the gales of love without help in You or in myself.” This going forth of the soul in search of the Beloved is the rising of the bride in the Canticle: “I will rise and go about the city; in the streets and the high ways I will seek Him Whom my soul loves. I have sought Him and have not found . . . they wounded me.”<sup>1</sup> The rising of the bride—speaking spiritually—is from that which is mean to that which is noble; and is the same with the going forth of the soul out of its own ways and inferior love to the ennobling love of God. The bride says that she was wounded because she found him not;<sup>2</sup> so the soul also says of itself that it is wounded with love and forsaken; that is, the loving soul is ever in pain during the absence of the Beloved, because it has given itself up wholly to Him hoping for the reward of its self-surrender, the Possession of the Beloved. Still the Beloved withholds Himself while the soul has lost all things, and even itself, for Him; it obtains no

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 3:2, 5:7

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 5:6,7

compensation for its loss, seeing that it is deprived of Him whom it loves.

28. This pain and sense of the absence of God is wont to be so oppressive in those who are going onwards to the state of perfection, that they would die if God did not interpose when the divine wounds are inflicted upon them. As they have the palate of the will wholesome, and the mind pure and disposed for God, and as they taste in some degree of the sweetness of divine love, which they supremely desire, so they also suffer supremely; for, having but a glimpse of an infinite good which they are not permitted to enjoy, that is to them an ineffable pain and torment.

## STANZA II

*O shepherds, you who go  
Through the sheepcots up the hill,  
If you shall see  
Him Whom I love,  
Tell Him I languish, suffer, and die.*

THE soul would now employ intercessors and mediators between itself and the Beloved, praying them to make its sufferings and afflictions known. One in love, when he cannot converse personally with the object of his love, will do so in the best way he can. Thus the soul employs its affections, desires, and groanings as messengers well able to manifest the secret of its heart to the Beloved. Accordingly, it calls upon them to do this, saying:

*“O shepherds, you who go.”*

2. The shepherds are the affections, and desires, and groanings of the soul, for they feed it with spiritual good things. A shepherd is one who feeds: and by means of such God communicates Himself to the soul and feeds it in the divine pastures; for without these groans and desires He communicates but slightly with it.

*“You who go.”*

You who go forth in pure love; for all desires and affections do not reach God, but only those which proceed from sincere love.

*“Through the sheepcots up the hill.”*

3. The sheepcots are the heavenly hierarchies, the angelic choirs, by whose ministry, from choir to choir, our prayers and sighs ascend to God; that is, to the hill, “for He is the highest eminence, and because in Him, as on a hill, we observe and behold all things, the higher and the lower sheepcots.” To Him our prayers ascend, offered by angels, as I have said; so the angel said to Tobit “When you prayed with tears, and buried the dead . . . I offered your prayer to the Lord.”<sup>1</sup>

4. The shepherds also are the angels themselves, who not only carry our petitions to God, but also bring down the graces of God to our souls, feeding them like good shepherds, with the sweet communications and inspirations of God, Who employs them in that ministry. They also protect us and defend us against the wolves, which are the evil spirits. And thus, whether we understand the affections or the angels by the shepherds, the soul calls upon both to be its messengers to the Beloved, and thus addresses them all:

*“If you shall see Him,”*

That is to say:

---

<sup>1</sup> Tob. 12:12

5. If, to my great happiness you shall come into His presence, so that He shall see you and hear your words. God, indeed, knows all things, even the very thoughts of the soul, as He said to Moses,<sup>1</sup> but it is then He beholds our necessities when He relieves them, and hears our prayers when he grants them. God does not see all necessities and hear all petitions until the time appointed shall have come; it is then that He is said to hear and see, as we learn in the book of Exodus. When the children of Israel had been afflicted for four hundred years as serfs in Egypt, God said to Moses, “I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and I have heard their cry, and . . . I am come down to deliver them.”<sup>2</sup> And yet He had seen it always. So also St. Gabriel bade Zachariah not to fear, because God had heard his prayer, and would grant him the son, for whom he had been praying for many years;<sup>3</sup> yet God had always heard him. Every soul ought to consider that God, though He does not at once help us and grant our petitions, will still succor us in His own time, for He is, as David says, “a helper in due time in tribulation,”<sup>4</sup> if we do not become faint-hearted and cease to pray. This is what the soul means by saying, “If you shall see Him”; that is to say, if the time is come when it shall be His good pleasure to grant my petitions.

6. “Whom I love the most”: that is, whom I love more than all creatures. This is true of the soul when nothing can make it afraid to do and suffer all things in His service. And when the soul can also truly say that which follows, it is a sign that it loves Him above all things:

*“Tell Him I languish, suffer, and die.”*

7. Here the soul speaks of three things that distress it: namely, languor, suffering, and death; for the soul that truly loves God with a love in some degree perfect, suffers in three ways in His absence, in its three powers ordinarily—the understanding, the will, and the memory. In the understanding it languishes because it does not see God, Who is the salvation of it, as the Psalmist says: “I am your salvation.”<sup>5</sup> In the will it suffers, because it possesses not God, Who is its comfort and delight, as David also says: “You shall make them drink of the torrent of Your pleasure.”<sup>6</sup> In the memory it dies, because it remembers its privation of all the blessings of the understanding, which are the vision of God, and of the delights of the will, which are the fruition of Him, and that it is very possible also that it may lose Him for ever, because of the dangers and chances of this life. In the memory, therefore, the soul labors under a sensation like that of death, because it sees itself without the certain and perfect fruition of God, Who is the life of the soul, as Moses says: “He is your life.”<sup>7</sup>

8. Jeremiah also, in the Lamentations, speaks of these three things, praying to God, and saying: “Remember my poverty . . . the wormwood and the gall.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 31:21

<sup>2</sup> Exod. 3:7,8

<sup>3</sup> Luke 1:13

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 9:10

<sup>5</sup> Ps. 34:3

<sup>6</sup> Ps. 35:9

<sup>7</sup> Deut. 30:20

<sup>8</sup> Lam. 3:19

Poverty relates to the understanding, to which appertain the riches of the knowledge of the Son of God, “in whom all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hid.”<sup>1</sup> The wormwood, which is a most bitter herb, relates to the will, to which appertains the sweetness of the fruition of God, deprived of which it abides in bitterness. We learn in the Revelation that bitterness appertains spiritually to the will, for the angel said to St. John: “Take the book and eat it up; and it shall make your belly bitter.”<sup>2</sup> Here the belly signifies the will. The gall relates not only to the memory, but also to all the powers and faculties of the soul, for it signifies the death thereof, as we learn from Moses speaking of the damned: “Their wine is the gall of dragons, and the venom of asps, which is incurable.”<sup>3</sup> This signifies the loss of God, which is the death of the soul.

9. These three things which distress the soul are grounded on the three theological virtues—faith, charity, and hope, which relate, in the order here assigned them, to the three faculties of the soul—understanding, will, and memory. Observe here that the soul does no more than represent its miseries and pain to the Beloved: for he who loves wisely does not care to ask for that which he wants and desires, being satisfied with hinting at his necessities, so that the beloved one may do what shall to him seem good. Thus the Blessed Virgin at the marriage feast of Cana asked not directly for wine, but only said to her Beloved Son, “They have no wine.”<sup>4</sup> The sisters of Lazarus sent to Him, not to ask Him to heal their brother, but only to say that he whom He loved was sick: “Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick.”<sup>5</sup>

10. There are three reasons for this. Our Lord knows what is expedient for us better than we do ourselves. Secondly, the Beloved is more compassionate towards us when He sees our necessities and our resignation. Thirdly, we are more secured against self-love and self-seeking when we represent our necessity, than when we ask for that which we think we need. It is in this way that the soul represents its three necessities; as if it said: “Tell my Beloved, that as I languish, and as He only is my salvation, to save me; that as I am suffering, and as He only is my joy, to give me joy; that as I am dying, and as He only is my life, to give me life.”

---

<sup>1</sup> Col. 2:3

<sup>2</sup> Rev. 10:9

<sup>3</sup> Deut. 32:33

<sup>4</sup> John 2:3

<sup>5</sup> John 11:3

### STANZA III

*In search of my Love  
I will go over mountains and strands;  
I will gather no flowers,  
I will fear no wild beasts;  
And pass by the mighty and the frontiers.*

THE soul, observing that its sighs and prayers suffice not to find the Beloved, and that it has not been helped by the messengers it invoked in the first and second stanzas, will not, because its searching is real and its love great, leave undone anything itself can do. The soul that really loves God is not dilatory in its efforts to find the Son of God, its Beloved; and, even when it has done all it could it is still not satisfied, thinking it has done nothing. Accordingly, the soul is now, in this third stanza, actively seeking the Beloved, and saying how He is to be found; namely, in the practice of all virtue and in the spiritual exercises of the active and contemplative life; for this end it rejects all delights and all comforts; and all the power and wiles of its three enemies, the world, the devil, and the flesh, are unable to delay it or hinder it on the road.

*“In search of my Love.”*

2. Here the soul makes it known that to find God it is not enough to pray with the heart and the tongue, or to have recourse to the help of others; we must also work ourselves, according to our power. God values one effort of our own more than many of others on our behalf; the soul, therefore, remembering the saying of the Beloved, “Seek and you shall find,”<sup>1</sup> is resolved on going forth, as I said just now, to seek Him actively, and not rest till it finds Him, as many do who will not that God should cost them anything but words, and even those carelessly uttered, and for His sake will do nothing that will cost them anything. Some, too, will not leave for His sake a place which is to their taste and liking, expecting to receive all the sweetness of God in their mouth and in their heart without moving a step, without mortifying themselves by the abandonment of a single pleasure or useless comfort.

3. But until they go forth out of themselves to seek Him, however loudly they may cry they will not find Him; for the bride in the Canticle sought Him in this way, but she found Him not until she went out to seek Him: “In my little bed in the nights I have sought Him Whom my soul loves: I have sought Him and have not found Him. I will rise and will go about the city: by the streets and highways I will seek Him Whom my soul loves.”<sup>2</sup> She afterwards adds that when she had endured certain trials she “found Him.”<sup>3</sup>

4. He, therefore, who seeks God, consulting his own ease and comfort, seeks Him by night, and therefore finds Him not. But he who seeks Him in the practice of

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 11:9

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 3:1

<sup>3</sup> Cant. 3:4

virtue and of good works, casting aside the comforts of his own bed, seeks Him by day; such a one shall find Him, for that which is not seen by night is visible by day. The Bridegroom Himself teaches us this, saying, “Wisdom is clear and never fades away, and is easily seen of them that love her, and is found of them that seek her. She prevents them that covet her, that she first may show herself to them. He that awakes early to seek her shall not labor; for he shall find her sitting at his doors.”<sup>1</sup> The soul that will go out of the house of its own will, and abandon the bed of its own satisfaction, will find the divine Wisdom, the Son of God, the Bridegroom waiting at the door without, and so the soul says:

*“I will go over mountains and strands.”*

5. Mountains, which are lofty, signify virtues, partly on account of their height and partly on account of the toil and labor of ascending them; the soul says it will ascend to them in the practice of the contemplative life. Strands, which are low, signify mortifications, penances, and the spiritual exercises, and the soul will add to the active life that of contemplation; for both are necessary in seeking after God and in acquiring virtue. The soul says, in effect, “In searching after my Beloved I will practice great virtue, and abase myself by lowly mortifications and acts of humility, for the way to seek God is to do good works in Him, and to mortify the evil in ourselves, as it is said in the words that follow:

*“I will gather no flowers.”*

6. He that will seek after God must have his heart detached, resolute, and free from all evils, and from all goods which are not simply God; that is the meaning of these words. The words that follow describe the liberty and courage which the soul must possess in searching after God. Here it declares that it will gather no flowers by the way—the flowers are all the delights, satisfactions, and pleasures which this life offers, and which, if the soul sought or accepted, would hinder it on the road.

7. These flowers are of three kinds—temporal, sensual, and spiritual. All of them occupy the heart, and stand in the way of the spiritual detachment required in the way of Christ, if we regard them or rest in them. The soul, therefore, says, that it will not stop to gather any of them, that it may seek after God. It seems to say, I will not set my heart upon riches or the goods of this world; I will not indulge in the satisfactions and ease of the flesh, neither will I consult the taste and comforts of my spirit, in order that nothing may detain me in my search after my Love on the toilsome mountains of virtue. This means that it accepts the counsel of the prophet David to those who travel on this road: “If riches abound, set not your heart upon them,”<sup>2</sup> This is applicable to sensual satisfactions, as well as to temporal goods and spiritual consolations.

8. From this we learn that not only temporal goods and bodily pleasures hinder us on the road to God, but spiritual delight and consolations also, if we attach ourselves to them or seek them; for these things are hindrances on the way of the cross of Christ, the Bridegroom. He, therefore, that will go onwards must not only not stop to gather flowers, but must also have the courage and resolution to say as

---

<sup>1</sup> Wisd. 6:13

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 61:11

follows:

*"I will fear no wild beasts and I will go over  
the mighty and the frontiers."*

Here we have the three enemies of the soul which make war against it, and make its way full of difficulties. The wild beasts are the world; the mighty, the devil; and the frontiers are the flesh.

9. The world is the wild beasts, because in the beginning of the heavenly journey the imagination pictures the world to the soul as wild beasts, threatening and fierce, principally in three ways. The first is, we must forfeit the world's favor, lose friends, credit, reputation, and property; the second is not less cruel: we must suffer the perpetual deprivation of all the comforts and pleasures of the world; and the third is still worse: evil tongues will rise against us, mock us, and speak of us with contempt. This strikes some persons so vividly that it becomes most difficult for them, I do not say to persevere, but even to enter on this road at all.

10. But there are generous souls who have to encounter wild beasts of a more interior and spiritual nature—trials, temptations, tribulations, and afflictions of diverse kinds, through which they must pass. This is what God sends to those whom He is raising upwards to high perfection, proving them and trying them as gold in the fire; as David says: "Many are the tribulations of the just; and out of all these our Lord will deliver them."<sup>1</sup> But the truly enamored soul, preferring the Beloved above all things, and relying on His love and favor, finds no difficulty in saying:

*"I will fear no wild beasts"  
"and pass over the mighty and the frontiers."*

11. Evil spirits, the second enemy of the soul, are called the mighty, because they strive with all their might to seize on the passes of the spiritual road; and because the temptations they suggest are harder to overcome, and the craft they employ more difficult to detect, than all the seductions of the world and the flesh; and because, also, they strengthen their own position by the help of the world and the flesh in order to fight vigorously against the soul. Hence the Psalmist calls them mighty, saying: "The mighty have sought after my soul."<sup>2</sup> The prophet Job also speaks of their might: "There is no power upon the earth that may be compared with him who was made to fear no man."<sup>3</sup>

12. There is no human power that can be compared with the power of the devil, and therefore the divine power alone can overcome him, and the divine light alone can penetrate his devices. No soul therefore can overcome his might without prayer, or detect his illusions without humility and mortification. Hence the exhortation of St. Paul to the faithful: "Put on the armor of God, that you may stand against the deceits of the devil: for our wrestling is not against flesh and blood."<sup>4</sup> Blood here is the world, and the armor of God is prayer and the cross of

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 33:20

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 53:5

<sup>3</sup> Job 41:24

<sup>4</sup> Eph. 6:11



Christ, wherein consist the humility and mortification of which I have spoken.

13. The soul says also that it will cross the frontiers: these are the natural resistance and rebellion of the flesh against the spirit, for, as St. Paul says, the “flesh lusts against the spirit,”<sup>1</sup> and sets itself as a frontier against the soul on its spiritual road. This frontier the soul must cross, surmounting difficulties, and trampling underfoot all sensual appetites and all natural affections with great courage and resolution of spirit: for while they remain in the soul, the spirit will be by them hindered from advancing to the true life and spiritual delight. This is set clearly before us by St. Paul, saying: “If by the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live.”<sup>2</sup> This, then, is the process which the soul in this stanza says it becomes it to observe on the way to seek the Beloved: which briefly is a firm resolution not to stoop to gather flowers by the way; courage not to fear the wild beasts, and strength to pass by the mighty and the frontiers; intent solely on going over the mountains and the strands of the virtues, in the way just explained.

---

<sup>1</sup> Gal. 5:17

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 8:13

## STANZA IV

*O groves and thickets  
Planted by the hand of the Beloved;  
O verdant meads  
Enameled with flowers,  
Tell me, has He passed by you?*

THE disposition requisite for entering on the spiritual journey, abstinence from joys and pleasure, being now described; and the courage also with which to overcome temptations and trials, wherein consists the practice of self-knowledge, which is the first step of the soul to the knowledge of God. Now, in this stanza the soul begins to advance through consideration and knowledge of creatures to the knowledge of the Beloved their Creator. For the consideration of the creature, after the practice of self-knowledge, is the first in order on the spiritual road to the knowledge of God, Whose grandeur and magnificence they declare, as the Apostle says: "For His invisible things from the creation of the world are seen, being understood by these things that are made."<sup>1</sup> It is as if he said, "The invisible things of God are made known to the soul by created things, visible and invisible."

2. The soul, then, in this stanza addresses itself to creatures inquiring after the Beloved. And we observe, as St. Augustine<sup>2</sup> says, that the inquiry made of creatures is a meditation on the Creator, for which they furnish the matter. Thus, in this stanza the soul meditates on the elements and the rest of the lower creation; on the heavens, and on the rest of created and material things which God has made therein; also on the heavenly Spirits, saying:

*"O groves and thickets."*

3. The groves are the elements, earth, water, air, and fire. As the most pleasant groves are studded with plants and shrubs, so the elements are thick with creatures, and here are called thickets because of the number and variety of creatures in each. The earth contains innumerable varieties of animals and plants, the water of fish, the air of birds, and fire concurs with all in animating and sustaining them. Each kind of animal lives in its proper element, placed and planted there, as in its own grove and soil where it is born and nourished; and, in truth, God so ordered it when He made them; He commanded the earth to bring forth herbs and animals; the waters and the sea, fish; and the air He gave as a habitation to birds. The soul, therefore, considering that this is the effect of His commandment, cries out,

*"Planted by the hand of the Beloved."*

4. That which the soul considers now is this: the hand of God the Beloved only could have created and nurtured all these varieties and wonderful things. The soul says deliberately, "by the hand of the Beloved," because God does many things

---

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 1:20

<sup>2</sup> Conf. 10. 6.

by the hands of others, as of angels and men; but the work of creation has never been, and never is, the work of any other hand than His own. Thus the soul, considering the creation, is profoundly stirred up to love God the Beloved for it beholds all things to be the work of His hands, and goes on to say:

*“O verdant meads.”*

5. These are the heavens; for the things which He has created in the heavens are of incorruptible freshness, which neither perish nor wither with time, where the just are refreshed as in the green pastures. The present consideration includes all the varieties of the stars in their beauty, and the other works in the heavens.

6. The Church also applies the term “verdure” to heavenly things; for while praying to God for the departing soul, it addresses it as follows: “May Christ, the Son of the living God, give you a place in the ever-pleasant verdure of His paradise.”<sup>1</sup> The soul also says that this verdant mead is

*“Enameled with flowers.”*

7. The flowers are the angels and the holy souls who adorn and beautify that place, as costly and fine enamel on a vase of pure gold.

*“Tell me, has He passed by you?”*

8. This inquiry is the consideration of the creature just spoken of, and is in effect: Tell me, what perfections has He created in you?

---

<sup>1</sup> Ordo commendationis animae.

## STANZA V

### ANSWER OF THE CREATURES

*A thousand graces diffusing  
He passed through the groves in haste,  
And merely regarding them  
As He passed,  
Clothed them with His beauty.*

THIS is the answer of the creatures to the soul which, according to St. Augustine, in the same place, is the testimony which they furnish to the majesty and perfections of God, for which it asked in its meditation on created things. The meaning of this stanza is, in substance, as follows: God created all things with great ease and rapidity, and left in them some tokens of Himself, not only by creating them out of nothing, but also by endowing them with innumerable graces and qualities, making them beautiful in admirable order and unceasing mutual dependence. All this He wrought in wisdom, by which He created them, which is the Word, His only begotten Son. Then the soul says;

*“A thousand graces diffusing.”*

2. These graces are the innumerable multitude of His creatures. The term “thousand,” which the soul makes use of, denotes not their number, but the impossibility of numbering them. They are called grace because of the qualities with which He has endowed them. He is said to diffuse them because He fills the whole world with them.

*“He passed through the groves in haste.”*

3. To pass through the groves is to create the elements; here called groves, through which He is said to pass, diffusing a thousand graces, because He adorned them with creatures which are all beautiful. Moreover, He diffused among them a thousand graces, giving the power of generation and self-conservation. He is said to pass through, because the creatures are, as it were, traces of the passage of God, revealing His majesty, power, and wisdom, and His other divine attributes. He is said to pass in haste, because the creatures are the least of the works of God: He made them, as it were, in passing. His greatest works, wherein He is most visible and at rest, are the incarnation of the Word and the mysteries of the Christian faith, in comparison with which all His other works were works wrought in passing and in haste.

*“And thereby regarding them  
As He passed,  
Clothed them with His beauty.”*

4. The son of God is, in the words of St. Paul, “the brightness of His glory and the

figure of His substance.”<sup>1</sup> God saw all things only in the face of His Son. This was to give them their natural being, bestowing upon them many graces and natural gifts, making them perfect, as it is written in the book of Genesis: “God saw all the things that He had made: and they were very good.”<sup>2</sup> To see all things very good was to make them very good in the Word, His Son. He not only gave them their being and their natural graces when He beheld them, but He also clothed them with beauty in the face of His Son, communicating to them a supernatural being when He made man, and exalted him to the beauty of God, and, by consequence, all creatures in him, because He united Himself to the nature of them all in man. For this cause the Son of God Himself said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all things to Myself.”<sup>3</sup> And thus in this exaltation of the incarnation of His Son, and the glory of His resurrection according to the flesh, the Father not only made all things beautiful in part, but also, we may well say, clothed them wholly with beauty and dignity.

#### NOTE

BUT beyond all this—speaking now of contemplation as it affects the soul and makes an impression on it—in the vivid contemplation and knowledge of created things the soul beholds such a multiplicity of graces, powers, and beauty with which God has endowed them, that they seem to it to be clothed with admirable beauty and supernatural virtue derived from the infinite supernatural beauty of the face of God, whose beholding of them clothed the heavens and the earth with beauty and joy; as it is written: “You open Your hand and fill with blessing every living creature.”<sup>4</sup> Hence the soul wounded with love of that beauty of the Beloved which it traces in created things, and anxious to behold that beauty which is the source of this visible beauty, sings as in the following stanza:

---

<sup>1</sup> Heb. 1:3

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 1:31

<sup>3</sup> John 12:32

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 144:16

## STANZA VI

### THE BRIDE

*Oh! who can heal me?  
Give me perfectly Yourself,  
Send me no more  
A messenger  
Who cannot tell me what I wish.*

AS created things furnish to the soul traces of the Beloved, and exhibit the impress of His beauty and magnificence, the love of the soul increases, and consequently the pain of His absence: for the greater the soul's knowledge of God the greater its desire to see Him, and its pain when it cannot; and as it sees there is no remedy for this pain except in the presence and vision of the Beloved, distrustful of every other remedy, it prays in this stanza for the fruition of His presence, saying: "Entertain me no more with any knowledge or communications or impressions of Your grandeur, for these do but increase my longing and the pain of Your absence; Your presence alone can satisfy my will and desire." The will cannot be satisfied with anything less than the vision of God, and therefore the soul prays that He may be pleased to give Himself to it in truth, in perfect love.

*"O! who can heal me?"*

2. That is, there is nothing in all the delights of the world, nothing in the satisfaction of the senses, nothing in the sweet taste of the spirit that can heal or content me, and therefore it adds:

*"Give me at once Yourself."*

3. No soul that really loves can be satisfied or content short of the fruition of God. For everything else, as I have just said, not only does not satisfy the soul, but rather increases the hunger and thirst of seeing Him as He is. Thus every glimpse of the Beloved, every knowledge and impression or communication from Him—these are the messengers suggestive of Him—increase and quicken the soul's desire after Him, as crumbs of food in hunger stimulate the appetite. The soul, therefore, mourning over the misery of being entertained by matters of so little moment, cries out:

*"Give me perfectly Yourself."*

4. Now all our knowledge of God in this life, however great it may be, is not a perfectly true knowledge of Him, because it is partial and incomplete; but to know Him essentially is true knowledge, and that is it which the soul prays for here, not satisfied with any other kind. Hence it says:

*"Send me no more a messenger."*

5. That is, grant that I may no longer know You in this imperfect way by the

messengers of knowledge and impressions, which are so distant from that which my soul desires; for these messengers, as You well know, O my Bridegroom, do but increase the pain of Your absence. They renew the wound which You have inflicted by the knowledge of You which they convey, and they seem to delay Your coming. Henceforth send me no more of these inadequate communications, for if I have been hitherto satisfied with them, it was owing to the slightness of my knowledge and of my love: now that my love has become great, I cannot satisfy myself with them; therefore, give me at once Yourself.

6. This, more clearly expressed, is as follows: "O Lord my Bridegroom, Who gave me Yourself partially before, give me Yourself wholly now. You who showed glimpses of Yourself before, show Yourself clearly now. You who communicated Yourself hitherto by the instrumentality of messengers—it was as if You mocked me—give Yourself by Yourself now. Sometimes when You visited me You gave me the pearl of Your possession, and, when I began to examine it, lo, it was gone, for You had hidden it Yourself: it was like a mockery. Give me then Yourself in truth, Your whole self, that I may have You wholly to myself wholly, and send me no messengers again."

*"Who cannot tell me what I wish."*

7. "I wish for You wholly, and Your messengers neither know You wholly, nor can they speak of You wholly, for there is nothing in earth or heaven that can furnish that knowledge to the soul which it longs for. They cannot tell me, therefore, what I wish. Instead, then, of these messengers, be You the messenger and the message."

## STANZA VII

*All they who serve are telling me  
Of Your unnumbered graces;  
And all wound me more and more,  
And something leaves me dying,  
I know not what, of which they are darkly speaking.*

THE soul describes itself in the foregoing stanza as wounded, or sick with love of the Bridegroom, because of the knowledge of Him which the irrational creation supplies, and in the present, as wounded with love because of the other and higher knowledge which it derives from the rational creation, nobler than the former; that is, angels and men. This is not all, for the soul says also that it is dying of love, because of that marvelous immensity not wholly but partially revealed to it through the rational creation. This it calls "I know not what," because it cannot be described, and because it is such that the soul dies of it.

2. It seems, from this, that there are three kinds of pain in the soul's love of the Beloved, corresponding to the three kinds of knowledge that can be had of Him. The first is called a wound; not deep, but slight, like a wound which heals quickly, because it comes from its knowledge of the creatures, which are the lowest works of God. This wounding of the soul, called also sickness, is thus spoken of by the bride in the Canticle: "I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, if you find my Beloved, that you tell Him that I languish with love."<sup>1</sup> The daughters of Jerusalem are the creatures.

3. The second is called a sore which enters deeper than a wound into the soul, and is, therefore, of longer continuance, because it is as a wound festering, on account of which the soul feels that it is really dying of love. This sore is the effect of the knowledge of the works of God, the incarnation of the Word, and the mysteries of the faith. These being the greatest works of God, and involving a greater love than those of creation, produce a greater effect of love in the soul. If the first kind of pain is as a wound, this must be like a festering, continuous sore. Of this speaks the Bridegroom, addressing Himself to the bride, saying: "You have wounded My heart, My sister, My bride; you have wounded My heart with one of your eyes, and with one hair of your neck."<sup>2</sup> The eye signifies faith in the incarnation of the Bridegroom, and the one hair is the love of the same.

4. The third kind of pain is like dying; it is as if the whole soul were festering because of its wound. It is dying a living death until love, having slain it, shall make it live the life of love, transforming it in love. This dying of love is affected by a single touch of the knowledge of the Divinity; it is the "I know not what," of which the creatures, as in the stanza is said, are speaking indistinctly. This touch is not continuous nor great,—for then soul and body would part—but soon over, and thus the soul is dying of love, and dying the more when it sees that it

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 5:8

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 4:9



cannot die of love.<sup>1</sup> This is called impatient love, which is spoken of in the book of Genesis, where the Scripture says that Rachel's love of children was so great that she said to Jacob her husband, "Give me children, otherwise I shall die."<sup>2</sup> And the prophet Job said, "Who will grant that . . . He that has begun the same would cut me off."<sup>3</sup>

5. These two-fold pains of love—that is, the wound and the dying—are in the stanza said to be merely the rational creation. The wound, when it speaks of the unnumbered graces of the Beloved in the mysteries and wisdom of God taught by the faith. The dying, when it is said that the rational creation speaks indistinctly. This is a sense and knowledge of the Divinity sometimes revealed when the soul hears God spoken of. Therefore it says:

*"All they who serve."*

6. That is, the rational creation, angels and men; for these alone are they who serve God, understanding by that word intelligent service; that is to say, all they who serve God. Some serve Him by contemplation and fruition in heaven—these are the angels; others by loving and longing for Him on earth—these are men. And because the soul learns to know God more distinctly through the rational creation, whether by considering its superiority over the rest of creation, or by what it teaches us of God—the angels interiorly by secret inspirations, and men exteriorly by the truths of Scripture—it says:

*"Telling me of Your unnumbered graces."*

7. That is, they speak of the wonders of Your grace and mercy in the Incarnation, and in the truths of the faith which they show forth and are ever telling more distinctly; for the more they say, the more do they reveal Your graces.

*"And all wound me more and more."*

8. The more the angels inspire me, the more men teach me, the more do I love You; and thus all wound me more and more with love.

*"And something leaves me dying,  
I know not what, of which they are darkly speaking."*

9. It is as if it said: "But beside the wound which the creatures inflict when they tell me of Your unnumbered graces, there is yet something which remains to be told, one thing unknown to be uttered, a most clear trace of the footsteps of God revealed to the soul, which it should follow, a most profound knowledge of God, which is ineffable, and therefore spoken of as 'I know not what.'" If that which I comprehend inflicts the wound and festering sore of love, that which I cannot comprehend but yet feel profoundly, kills me.

10. This happens occasionally to souls advanced, whom God favors in what they hear, or see, or understand—and sometimes without these or other means—with

<sup>1</sup> See 'Living Flame,' stanza 3, line 3, sect. 20.

<sup>2</sup> Gen. 30:1

<sup>3</sup> Job 6:8,9

a certain profound knowledge, in which they feel or apprehend the greatness and majesty of God. In this state they think so highly of God as to see clearly that they know Him not, and in their perception of His greatness they recognize that not to comprehend Him is the highest comprehension. And thus, one of the greatest favors of God, bestowed transiently on the soul in this life, is to enable it to see so distinctly, and to feel so profoundly, that it clearly understands it cannot comprehend Him at all. These souls are herein, in some degree, like the saints in heaven, where they who know Him most perfectly perceive most clearly that He is infinitely incomprehensible, for those who have the less clear vision, do not perceive so distinctly as the others, how greatly He transcends their vision. This is clear to none who have not had experience of it. But the experienced soul, comprehending that there is something further of which it is profoundly sensible, calls it, "I know not what." As that cannot be understood, so neither can it be described, though it is felt, as I have said. Hence the soul says that the creatures speak indistinctly, because they cannot distinctly utter that which they would say: it is the speech of infants, who cannot explain distinctly or speak intelligibly that which they would convey to others.

11. The other creatures, also, are in some measure a revelation to the soul in this way, but not of an order so high, whenever it is the good pleasure of God to manifest to it their spiritual sense and significance; they are seemingly on the point of making us understand the perfections of God, and cannot compass it; it is as if one were about to explain a matter and the explanation is not given; and thus they stammer "I know not what." The soul continues to complain, and addresses its own life, saying, in the stanza that follows:

## STANZA VIII

*But how you persevere, O life!  
Not living where you live;  
The arrows bring death  
Which you receive  
From your conceptions of the Beloved.*

THE soul, perceiving itself to be dying of love, as it has just said, and yet not dying so as to have the free enjoyment of its love, complains of the continuance of its bodily life, by which the spiritual life is delayed. Here the soul addresses itself to the life it is living upon earth, magnifying the sorrows of it. The meaning of the stanza therefore is as follows: "O life of my soul, how can you persevere in this life of the flesh, seeing that it is your death and the privation of the true spiritual life in God, in Whom you live in substance, love, and desire, more truly than in the body? And if this were not reason enough to depart, and free yourself from the body of this death, so as to live and enjoy the life of God, how can you still remain in a body so frail? Besides, these wounds of love made by the Beloved in the revelation of His majesty are by themselves alone sufficient to put an end to your life, for they are very deep; and thus all your feelings towards Him, and all you know of Him, are so many touches and wounds of love that kill,

*"But how you persevere, O life!  
Not living where you live."*

2. We must keep in mind, for the better understanding of this, that the soul lives there where it loves, rather than in the body which it animates. The soul does not live by the body, but, on the contrary, gives it life, and lives by love in that which it loves. For beside this life of love which it lives in God Who loves it, the soul has its radical and natural life in God, like all created things, according to the saying of St. Paul: "In Him we live, and move, and are;"<sup>1</sup> that is, our life, motion, and being is in God. St. John also says that all that was made was life in God: "That which was made, in Him was life."<sup>2</sup>

3. When the soul sees that its natural life is in God through the being He has given it, and its spiritual life also because of the love it bears Him, it breaks forth into lamentations, complaining that so frail a life in a mortal body should have the power to hinder it from the fruition of the true, real, and delicious life, which it lives in God by nature and by love. Earnestly, therefore, does the soul insist upon this: it tells us that it suffers between two contradictions—its natural life in the body, and its spiritual life in God; contrary the one to the other, because of their mutual repugnance. The soul living this double life is of necessity in great pain; for the painful life hinders the delicious, so that the natural life is as death, seeing

---

<sup>1</sup> Acts 17:28

<sup>2</sup> John 1:3. The Saint adopts an old punctuation, different from the usual one. He reads thus: 'Omnia per Ipsum facta sunt, et sine Ipso factum est nihil: Quod factum est, in Ipso vita erat' ('All things were made by Him, and without Him nothing was made: What was made in Him was life').

that it deprives the soul of its spiritual life, wherein is its whole being and life by nature, and all its operations and feelings by love. The soul, therefore, to depict more vividly the hardships of this fragile life, says:

*“The arrows bring death  
which you receive.”*

4. That is to say: “Besides, how can you continue in the body, seeing that the touches of love—these are the arrows—with which the Beloved pierces your heart, are alone sufficient to deprive you of life?” These touches of love make the soul and heart so fruitful of the knowledge and love of God, that they may well be called conceptions of God, as in the words that follow:

*“From your conceptions of the Beloved.”*

5. That is, of the majesty, beauty, wisdom, grace, and power, which you know to be His.

#### NOTE

AS the hart wounded with a poisoned arrow cannot be easy and at rest, but seeks relief on all sides, plunging into the waters here and again there, while the poison spreads notwithstanding all attempts at relief, till it reaches the heart, and occasions death; so the soul, pierced by the arrow of love, never ceases from seeking to alleviate its pains. Not only does it not succeed, but its pains increase, let it think, and say, and do what it may; and knowing this, and that there is no other remedy but the resignation of itself into the hands of Him Who wounded it, that He may relieve it, and effectually slay it through the violence of its love; it turns towards the Bridegroom, Who is the cause of all, and says:

## STANZA IX

*Why, after wounding  
This heart, have You not healed it?  
And why, after stealing it,  
Have You thus abandoned it,  
And not carried away the stolen prey?*

HERE the soul returns to the Beloved, still complaining of its pain; for that impatient love which the soul now exhibits admits of no rest or cessation from pain; so it sets forth its griefs in all manner of ways until it finds relief. The soul seeing itself wounded and lonely, and as no one can heal it but the Beloved Who has wounded it, asks why He, having wounded its heart with that love which the knowledge of Him brings, does not heal it in the vision of His presence; and why He thus abandons the heart which He has stolen through the love Which inflames it, after having deprived the soul of all power over it. The soul has now no power over its heart—for he who loves has none—because it is surrendered to the Beloved, and yet He has not taken it to Himself in the pure and perfect transformation of love in glory.

*“Why, after wounding this heart,  
have You not healed it?”*

2. The enamored soul is complaining not because it is wounded, for the deeper the wound the greater the joy, but because, being wounded, it is not healed by being wounded to death. The wounds of love are so deliciously sweet, that if they do not kill, they cannot satisfy the soul. They are so sweet that it desires to die of them, and hence it is that it says, “Why, after wounding this heart, have You not healed it?” That is, “Why have You struck it so sharply as to wound it so deeply, and yet not healed it by killing it utterly with love? As You are the cause of its pain in the affliction of love, be You also the cause of its health by a death from love; so the heart, wounded by the pain of Your absence, shall be healed in the delight and glory of Your Sweet presence.” Therefore it goes on:

*“And why, after stealing it,  
have You thus abandoned it?”*

3. Stealing is nothing else but the act of a robber in dispossessing the owner of his goods, and possessing them himself. Here the soul complains to the Beloved that He has robbed it of its heart lovingly, and taken it out of its power and possession, and then abandoned it, without taking it into His own power and possession as the thief does with the goods he steals, carrying them away with him. He who is in love is said to have lost his heart, or to have it stolen by the object of his love; because it is no longer in his own possession, but in the power of the object of his love, and so his heart is not his own, but the property of the person he loves.

4. This consideration will enable the soul to determine whether it loves God simply or not. If it loves Him it will have no heart for itself, nor for its own pleasure or profit, but for the honor, glory, and pleasure of God; because the more

the heart is occupied with self, the less is it occupied with God. Whether God has really stolen the heart, the soul may ascertain by either of these two signs: Is it anxiously seeking after God? and has it no pleasure in anything but in Him, as the soul here says? The reason of this is that the heart cannot rest in peace without the possession of something; and when its affections are once placed, it has neither the possession of itself nor of anything else; neither does it perfectly possess what it loves. In this state its weariness is in proportion to its loss, until it shall enter into possession and be satisfied; for until then the soul is as an empty vessel waiting to be filled, as a hungry man eager for food, as a sick man sighing for health, and as a man suspended in the air.

*“And not carried away the stolen prey?”*

5. “Why do You not carry away the heart which Your love has stolen, to fill it, to heal it, and to satiate it giving it perfect rest in Yourself?”

6. The loving soul, for the sake of greater conformity with the Beloved, cannot cease to desire the recompense and reward of its love for the sake of which it serves the Beloved, otherwise it could not be true love, for the recompense of love is nothing else, and the soul seeks nothing else, but greater love, until it reaches the perfection of love; for the sole reward of love is love, as we learn from the prophet Job, who, speaking of his own distress, which is that of the soul now referred to, says: “As a servant longs for the shade, as the hireling looks for the end of his work; so I also have had empty months, and have numbered to myself wearisome nights. If I sleep, I say, When shall I arise? and again, I shall look for the evening, and shall be filled with sorrows even till darkness.”<sup>1</sup>

7. Thus, then, the soul on fire with the love of God longs for the perfection and consummation of its love, that it may be completely refreshed. As the servant wearied by the heat of the day longs for the cooling shade, and as the hireling looks for the end of his work, so the soul for the end of its own. Observe, Job does not say that the hireling looks for the end of his labor, but only for the end of his work. He teaches us that the soul which loves looks not for the end of its labor, but for the end of its work; because its work is to love, and it is the end of this work, which is love, that it hopes for, namely, the perfect love of God. Until it attains to this, the words of Job will be always true of it—its months will be empty, and its nights wearisome and tedious. It is clear, then, that the soul which loves God seeks and looks for no other reward of its services than to love God perfectly.

#### NOTE

THE soul, having reached this degree of love, resembles a sick man exceedingly wearied, whose appetite is gone, and to whom his food is loathsome, and all things annoyance and trouble. Amidst all things that present themselves to his thoughts, or feelings, or sight, his only wish and desire is health; and everything that does not contribute to it is weariness and oppressive. The soul, therefore, in pain because of its love of God, has three peculiarities. Under all circumstances, and in all affairs, the thought of its health—that is, the Beloved—is ever present to it; and though it is obliged to attend to them because it cannot help it, its heart is ever with Him. The second peculiarity, namely, a loss of pleasure in everything,

---

<sup>1</sup> Job 7:2-4

arises from the first. The third also, a consequence of the second, is that all things become wearisome, and all affairs full of vexation and annoyance.

2. The reason is that the palate of the will having touched and tasted of the food of the love of God, the will instantly, under all circumstances, regardless of every other consideration, seeks the fruition of the Beloved. It is with the soul now as it was with Mary Magdalene, when in her burning love she sought Him in the garden. She, thinking Him to be the gardener, spoke to Him without further reflection, saying: "If you have taken Him hence, tell me where you have laid Him, and I will take Him away."<sup>1</sup> The soul is under the influence of a like anxiety to find Him in all things, and not finding Him immediately, as it desires—but rather the very reverse—not only has no pleasure in them, but is even tormented by them, and sometimes exceedingly so: for such souls suffer greatly in their intercourse with men and in the transactions of the world, because these things hinder rather than help them in their search.

3. The bride in the Cantic shows us that she had these three peculiarities when seeking the Bridegroom. "I sought Him and found Him not; the keepers that go about the city found me, they struck me and wounded me: the keepers of the walls took away my cloak."<sup>2</sup> The keepers that go about the city are the affairs of this world, which, when they "find" a soul seeking after God, inflict upon it much pain, and grief, and loathing; for the soul not only does not find in them what it seeks, but rather a hindrance. They who keep the wall of contemplation, that the soul may not enter—that is, evil spirits and worldly affairs—take away the cloak of peace and the quiet of loving contemplation. All this inflicts infinite vexation on the soul enamored of God; and while it remains on earth without the vision of God, there is no relief, great or small, from these afflictions, and the soul therefore continues to complain to the Beloved, saying:

---

<sup>1</sup> John 20:15

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 6:6,7

## STANZA X

*Quench my troubles,  
For no one else can soothe them;  
And let my eyes behold You,  
For You are their light,  
And I will keep them for You alone.*

HERE the soul continues to beseech the Beloved to put an end to its anxieties and distress—none other than He can do so—and that in such a way that its eyes may behold Him; for He alone is the light by which they see, and there is none other but He on whom it will look.

*“Quench my troubles.”*

2. The desire of love has this property, that everything said or done which does not become that which the will loves, wearies and annoys it, and makes it peevish when it sees itself disappointed in its desires. This and its weary longing after the vision of God is here called “troubles.” These troubles nothing can remove except the possession of the Beloved; hence the soul prays Him to quench them with His presence, to cool their feverishness, as the cooling water him who is wearied by the heat. The soul makes use of the expression “quench,” to denote its sufferings from the fire of love.

*“For no one else can soothe them.”*

3. The soul, in order to move and persuade the Beloved to grant its petition, says, “As none other but You can satisfy my needs, You quench my troubles.” Remember here that God is then close at hand, to comfort the soul and to satisfy its wants, when it has and seeks no satisfaction or comfort out of Him. The soul that finds no pleasure out of God cannot be long unvisited by the Beloved.

*“And let my eyes behold You.”*

4. Let me see You face to face with the eyes of the soul,

*“For you are their light.”*

5. God is the supernatural light of the soul, without which it abides in darkness. And now, in the excess of its affection, it calls Him the light of its eyes, as an earthly lover, to express his affection, calls the object of his love the light of his eyes. The soul says in effect in the foregoing terms, “Since my eyes have no other light, either of nature or of love, but You, let them behold You, Who in every way are their light.” David was regretting this light when he said in his trouble, “The light of my eyes, and the same is not with me;”<sup>1</sup> and Tobit, when he said, “What manner of joy shall be to me who sit in darkness, and see not the light of

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 37:11



heaven?”<sup>1</sup> He was longing for the clear vision of God; for the light of heaven is the Son of God; as St. John says in the Revelation: “And the city needs not sun, nor moon to shine in it; for the glory of God has illuminated it, and the Lamb is the lamp thereof.”<sup>2</sup>

*“And I will keep them for You alone.”*

6. The soul seeks to constrain the Bridegroom to let it see the light of its eyes, not only because it would be in darkness without it, but also because it will not look upon anything but on Him. For as that soul is justly deprived of this divine light if it fixes the eyes of the will on any other light, proceeding from anything that is not God, for then its vision is confined to that object; so also the soul, by a certain fitness, deserves the divine light, if it shuts its eyes against all objects whatever, to open them only for the vision of God.

#### NOTE

BUT the loving Bridegroom of souls cannot bear to see them suffer long in the isolation of which I am speaking, for, as He says by the mouth of Zachariah, “He that shall touch you, touches the apple of My eye;”<sup>3</sup> especially when their sufferings, as those of this soul, proceed from their love for Him. Therefore does He speak through Isaiah, “It shall be before they call, I will hear; as they are yet speaking, I will hear.”<sup>4</sup> And the wise man says that the soul that seeks Him as treasure shall find Him.<sup>5</sup> God grants a certain spiritual presence of Himself to the fervent prayers of the loving soul which seeks Him more earnestly than treasure, seeing that it has abandoned all things, and even itself, for His sake.

2. In that presence He shows certain profound glimpses of His divinity and beauty, whereby He still increases the soul’s anxious desire to behold Him. For as men throw water on the coals of the forge to cause intenser heat, so our Lord in His dealings with certain souls, in the intermission of their love, makes some revelations of His majesty, to quicken their fervor, and to prepare them more and more for those graces which He will give them afterwards. Thus the soul, in that obscure presence of God, beholding and feeling the supreme good and beauty hidden there, is dying in desire of the vision, saying in the stanza that follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> Tob. 5:12

<sup>2</sup> Rev. 21:23

<sup>3</sup> Zech. 2:8

<sup>4</sup> Isa. 65:24

<sup>5</sup> Prov. 2:4,5

## STANZA XI

*Reveal Your presence,  
And let the vision and Your beauty kill me.  
Behold the malady  
Of love is incurable  
Except in Your presence and before Your face.*

THE soul, anxious to be possessed by God, Who is so great, Whose love has wounded and stolen its heart, and unable to suffer more, beseeches Him directly, in this stanza, to reveal His beauty—that is, the divine Essence—and to slay it in that vision, separating it from the body, in which it can neither see nor possess Him as it desires. And further, setting before Him the distress and sorrow of heart, in which it continues, suffering it because of its love, and unable to find any other remedy than the glorious vision of the divine essence, cries out: “Reveal Your presence.”

2. To understand this clearly we must remember that there are three ways in which God is present in the soul. The first is His presence in essence, not in holy souls only, but in wretched and sinful souls as well, and also in all created things; for it is by this presence that He gives life and being, and were it once withdrawn all things would return to nothing.<sup>1</sup> This presence never fails in the soul.

3. The second is His presence by grace, whereby He dwells in the soul, pleased and satisfied with it. This presence is not in all souls; for those who fall into mortal sin lose it, and no soul can know in a natural way whether it has it or not. The third is His presence by spiritual affection. God is wont to show His presence in many devout souls in diverse ways, in refreshment, joy, and gladness; yet this, like the others, is all secret, for He does not show Himself as He is, because the condition of our mortal life does not admit of it. Thus this prayer of the soul may be understood of any one of them.

*“Reveal Your presence.”*

4. Inasmuch as it is certain that God is ever present in the soul, at least in the first way, the soul does not say, “Be present”; but, “Reveal and manifest Your hidden presence, whether natural, spiritual, or affective, in such a way that I may behold You in Your divine essence and beauty.” The soul prays Him that as He by His essential presence gives it its natural being, and perfects it by His presence of grace, so also He would glorify it by the manifestation of His glory. But as the soul is now loving God with fervent affections, the presence, for the revelation of which it prays the Beloved to manifest, is to be understood chiefly of the affective presence of the Beloved. Such is the nature of this presence that the soul felt there was an infinite being hidden there, out of which God communicated to it certain obscure visions of His own divine beauty. Such was the effect of these visions that the soul longed and fainted away with the desire of that which is hidden in that presence.

---

<sup>1</sup> See ‘Ascent of Mount Carmel,’ bk. 2, ch. 5, sect. 3.

5. This is in harmony with the experience of David, when he said: "My soul longs and faints for the courts of our Lord."<sup>1</sup> The soul now faints with desire of being absorbed in the Sovereign Good which it feels to be present and hidden; for though it is hidden, the soul is most profoundly conscious of the good and delight which are there. The soul is therefore attracted to this good with more violence than matter is to its center, and is unable to contain itself, by reason of the force of this attraction, from saying:

*"Reveal Your presence."*

6. Moses, on Mount Sinai in the presence of God, saw such glimpses of the majesty and beauty of His hidden Divinity, that, unable to endure it, he prayed twice for the vision of His glory saying: "Whereas You have said: I know you by name, and you have found grace in my sight. If, therefore, I have found grace in Your sight, show me Your face, that I may know You and may find grace before Your eyes;"<sup>2</sup> that is, the grace which he longed for—to attain to the perfect love of the glory of God. The answer of our Lord was: "You can not see My face, for man shall not see Me and live."<sup>3</sup> It is as if God had said: "Moses, your prayer is difficult to grant; the beauty of My face, and the joy in seeing Me is so great, as to be more than your soul can bear in a mortal body that is so weak." The soul accordingly, conscious of this truth, either because of the answer made to Moses or also because of that which I spoke of before,<sup>4</sup> namely, the feeling that there is something still in the presence of God here which it could not see in its beauty in the life it is now living, because, as I said before,<sup>5</sup> it faints when it sees but a glimpse of it. Hence it comes that it anticipates the answer that may be given to it, as it was to Moses, and says:

*"Let the vision and Your beauty kill me."*

7. That is, "Since the vision of You and Your beauty is so full of delight that I cannot endure, but must die in the act of beholding them, let the vision and Your beauty kill me."

8. Two visions are said to be fatal to man, because he cannot bear them and live. One, that of the basilisk, at the sight of which men are said to die at once. The other is the vision of God; but there is a great difference between them. The former kills by poison, the other with infinite health and bliss. It is, therefore, nothing strange for the soul to desire to die by beholding the beauty of God in order to enjoy Him for ever. If the soul had but one single glimpse of the majesty and beauty of God, not only would it desire to die once in order to see Him for ever, as it desires now, but would most joyfully undergo a thousand most bitter deaths to see Him even for a moment, and having seen Him would suffer as many deaths again to see Him for another moment.

9. It is necessary to observe for the better explanation of this line, that the soul is

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 83:3

<sup>2</sup> Exod. 33:12,13

<sup>3</sup> Exod. 33:20

<sup>4</sup> Stan. vii. sect. 10.

<sup>5</sup> Above, sect. 4.

now speaking conditionally, when it prays that the vision and beauty may slay it; it assumes that the vision must be preceded by death, for if it were possible before death, the soul would not pray for death, because the desire of death is a natural imperfection. The soul, therefore, takes it for granted that this corruptible life cannot coexist with the incorruptible life of God, and says:

*“Let the vision and Your beauty kill me.”*

10. St. Paul teaches this doctrine to the Corinthians when he says: “We would not be spoiled, but overclothed, that that which is mortal may be swallowed up of life,”<sup>1</sup> That is, “we would not be divested of the flesh, but invested with glory.” But reflecting that he could not live in glory and in a mortal body at the same time, he says to the Philippians: “having a desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ.”<sup>2</sup>

11. Here arises this question, Why did the people of Israel of old dread and avoid the vision of God, that they might not die, as it appears they did from the words of Manoaah to his wife, “We shall die because we have seen God,”<sup>3</sup> when the soul desires to die of that vision? To this question two answers may be given.

12. In those days men could not see God, though dying in the state of grace, because Christ had not come. It was therefore more profitable for them to live in the flesh, increasing in merit, and enjoying their natural life, than to be in Limbo, incapable of meriting, suffering in the darkness and in the spiritual absence of God. They therefore considered it a great grace and blessing to live long upon earth.

13. The second answer is founded on considerations drawn from the love of God. They in those days, not being so confirmed in love, nor so near to God by love, were afraid of the vision: but, now, under the law of grace, when, on the death of the body, the soul may behold God, it is more profitable to live but a short time, and then to die in order to see Him. And even if the vision were withheld, the soul that really loves God will not be afraid to die at the sight of Him; for true love accepts with perfect resignation, and in the same spirit, and even with joy, whatever comes to it from the hands of the Beloved, whether prosperity or adversity—yes, and even chastisements such as He shall be pleased to send, for, as St. John says, “perfect charity casts out fear.”<sup>4</sup>

14. Thus, then, there is no bitterness in death to the soul that loves, when it brings with it all the sweetness and delights of love; there is no sadness in the remembrance of it when it opens the door to all joy; nor can it be painful and oppressive, when it is the end of all unhappiness and sorrow, and the beginning of all good. Yes, the soul looks upon it as a friend and its bride, and exults in the recollection of it as the day of espousals; it yearns for the day and hour of death more than the kings of the earth for principalities and kingdoms.

15. It was of this kind of death that the wise man said, “O death, your judgment is

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 5:4

<sup>2</sup> Phil. 1:23

<sup>3</sup> Judg. 13:22

<sup>4</sup> 1 John 4:18

good to the needy man.”<sup>1</sup> If it is good to the needy man, though it does not supply his wants, but on the contrary deprives him even of what he has, how much more good will it be to the soul in need of love and which is crying for more, when it will not only not rob it of the love it has already, but will be the occasion of that fullness of love which it yearns for, and is the supply of all its necessities. It is not without reason, then, that the soul ventures to say:

*“Let the vision and Your beauty kill me.”*

16. The soul knows well that in the instant of that vision it will be itself absorbed and transformed into that beauty, and be made beautiful like it, enriched, and abounding in beauty as that beauty itself. This is why David said, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints,”<sup>2</sup> but that could not be if they did not become partakers of His glory, for there is nothing precious in the eyes of God except that which He is Himself, and therefore, the soul, when it loves, fears not death, but rather desires it. But the sinner is always afraid to die, because he suspects that death will deprive him of all good, and inflict upon him all evil; for in the words of David, “the death of the wicked is very evil,”<sup>3</sup> and therefore, as the wise man says, the very thought of it is bitter: “O death, how bitter is your memory to a man that has peace in his riches!”<sup>4</sup> The wicked love this life greatly, and the next but little, and are therefore afraid of death; but the soul that loves God lives more in the next life than in this, because it lives rather where it loves than where it dwells, and therefore esteeming but lightly its present bodily life, cries out: “Let the vision and Your beauty kill me.”

*“Behold, the malady of love is incurable,  
except in Your presence and before Your face.”*

17. The reason why the malady of love admits of no other remedy than the presence and countenance of the Beloved is that the malady of love differs from every other sickness, and therefore requires a different remedy. In other diseases, according to sound philosophy, contraries are cured by contraries; but love is not cured but by that which is in harmony with itself. The reason is that the health of the soul consists in the love of God; and so when that love is not perfect, its health is not perfect, and the soul is therefore sick, for sickness is nothing else but a failure of health. Thus, that soul which loves not at all is dead; but when it loves a little, however little that may be, it is then alive, though exceedingly weak and sick because it loves God so little. But the more its love increases, the greater will be its health, and when its love is perfect, then, too, its health also is perfect. Love is not perfect until the lovers become so on an equality as to be mutually transformed into one another; then love is wholly perfect.

18. And because the soul is now conscious of a certain adumbration of love, which is the malady of which it here speaks, yearning to be made like to Him of whom it is a shadow, that is the Bridegroom, the Word, the Son of God, Who, as St. Paul says, is the “splendor of His glory, and the figure of His substance;”<sup>5</sup> and because

---

<sup>1</sup> Ecclus. 41:3

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 115:15

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 33:22

<sup>4</sup> Ecclus. 41:1

<sup>5</sup> Heb. 1:3

it is into this figure it desires to be transformed by love, cries out, "Behold, the malady of love is incurable except in Your presence, and in the light of Your Countenance." The love that is imperfect is rightly called a malady, because as a sick man is enfeebled and cannot work, so the soul that is weak in love is also enfeebled and cannot practice heroic virtue.

19. Another explanation of these words is this: he who feels this malady of love—that is, a failure of it—has an evidence in himself that he has some love, because he ascertains what is deficient in him by that which he possesses. But he who is not conscious of this malady has evidence therein that he has no love at all, or that he has already attained to perfect love.

#### NOTE

THE soul now conscious of a vehement longing after God, like a stone rushing to its center, and like wax which has begun to receive the impression of the seal which it cannot perfectly represent, and knowing, moreover, that it is like a picture lightly sketched, crying for the artist to finish his work, and having its faith so clear as to trace most distinctly certain divine glimpses of the majesty of God, knows not what else to do but to turn inward to that faith—as involving and veiling the face and beauty of the Beloved—from which it has received those impressions and pledges of love, and which it thus addresses:

## STANZA XII

*O crystal well!  
O that on Your silvered surface  
You would mirror forth at once  
Those desired eyes  
Which are outlined in my heart.*

THE soul vehemently desiring to be united to the Bridegroom, and seeing that there is no help or succor in created things, turns towards the faith, as to that which gives it the most vivid vision of the Beloved, and adopts it as the means to that end. And, indeed, there is no other way of attaining to true union, to the spiritual betrothal of God, according to the words of Hosea: "I will betrothe you to Me in faith."<sup>1</sup> In this fervent desire it cries out in the words of this stanza, which are in effect this: "O faith of Christ, my Bridegroom! Oh that you would manifest clearly those truths concerning the Beloved, secretly and obscurely infused—for faith is, as theologians say, an obscure habit—so that your informal and obscure communications may be in a moment clear; Oh that you would withdraw yourself formally and completely from these truths—for faith is a veil over the truths of God—and reveal them perfectly in glory." Accordingly it says:

*"O crystal well!"*

2. Faith is called crystal for two reasons: because it is of Christ the Bridegroom; because it has the property of crystal, pure in its truths, a limpid well clear of error, and of natural forms. It is a well because the waters of all spiritual goodness flow from it into the soul. Christ our Lord, speaking to the woman of Samaria, calls faith a well, saying, "The water that I will give him shall become in him a well of water springing up into life everlasting."<sup>2</sup> This water is the Spirit which they who believe shall receive by faith in Him. "Now this He said of the Spirit which they who believed in Him should receive."<sup>3</sup>

*"Oh that on your silvered surface."*

3. The articles and definitions of the faith are called silvered surfaces. In order to understand these words and those that follow, we must know that faith is compared to silver because of the propositions it teaches us, the truth and substance it involves being compared to gold. This very substance which we now believe, hidden behind the silver veil of faith, we shall clearly behold and enjoy hereafter; the gold of faith shall be made manifest. Hence the Psalmist, speaking of this, says: "If you sleep amidst the lots, the wings of the dove are laid over with silver, and the hinder parts of the back in the paleness of gold."<sup>4</sup> That means if we shall keep the eyes of the understanding from regarding the things of heaven and of earth—this the Psalmist calls sleeping in the midst—we shall be firm in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Hos. 2:20

<sup>2</sup> John 4:14

<sup>3</sup> John 7:39

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 67:14

faith, here called dove, the wings of which are the truths laid over with silver, because in this life the faith puts these truths before us obscurely beneath a veil. This is the reason why the soul calls them silvered surface. But when faith shall have been consummated in the clear vision of God, then the substance of faith, the silver veil removed, will shine as gold.

4. As the faith gives and communicates to us God Himself, but hidden beneath the silver of faith, yet it reveals Him none the less. So if a man gives us a vessel made of gold, but covered with silver, he gives us in reality a vessel of gold, though the gold is covered over. Thus, when the bride in the Cantic was longing for the fruition of God, He promised it to her so far as the state of this life admitted of it, saying: "We will make you chains of gold inlaid with silver."<sup>1</sup> He thus promised to give Himself to her under the veil of faith. Hence the soul addresses the faith, saying: "Oh that on your silvered surface"—the definitions of faith—"in which you hide" the gold of the divine rays—which are the desired eyes,—instantly adding:

*"You would mirror forth at once those desired eyes!"*

5. By the eyes are understood, as I have said, the rays and truths of God, which are set before us hidden and informal in the definitions of the faith. Thus the words say in substance: "Oh that you would formally and explicitly reveal to me those hidden truths which You teach implicitly and obscurely in the definitions of the faith; according to my earnest desire." Those truths are called eyes, because of the special presence of the Beloved, of which the soul is conscious, believing Him to be perpetually regarding it; and so it says:

*"Which are outlined in my heart."*

6. The soul here says that these truths are outlined in the heart—that is, in the understanding and the will. It is through the understanding that these truths are infused into the soul by faith. They are said to be outlined because the knowledge of them is not perfect. As a sketch is not a perfect picture, so the knowledge that comes by faith is not a perfect understanding. The truths, therefore, infused into the soul by faith are as it were in outline, and when the clear vision shall be granted, then they will be as a perfect and finished picture, according to the words of the Apostle: "When that shall come which is perfect, that shall be made void which is in part."<sup>2</sup> "That which is perfect" is the clear vision, and "that which is in part" is the knowledge that comes by faith.

7. Besides this outline which comes by faith, there is another by love in the soul that loves—that is, in the will—in which the face of the Beloved is so deeply and vividly pictured, when the union of love occurs, that it may be truly said the Beloved lives in the loving soul, and the loving soul in the Beloved. Love produces such a resemblance by the transformation of those who love that one may be said to be the other, and both but one. The reason is, that in the union and transformation of love one gives himself up to the other as his possession, and each resigns, abandons, and exchanges himself for the other, and both become but one in the transformation wrought by love.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 1:10

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 13:10



8. This is the meaning of St. Paul when he said, "I live, now, not I, but Christ lives in me."<sup>1</sup> In that He says, "I live, now, not I," his meaning is, that though he lived, yet the life he lived was not his own, because he was transformed in Christ: that his life was divine rather than human; and for that reason, he said it was not he that lived, but Christ Who lived in him. We may therefore say, according to this likeness of transformation, that his life and the life of Christ were one by the union of love. This will be perfect in heaven in the divine life of all those who shall merit the beatific vision; for, transformed in God, they will live the life of God and not their own, since the life of God will be theirs. Then they will say in truth. "We live, but not we ourselves, for God lives in us."

9. Now, this may take place in this life, as in the case of St. Paul, but not perfectly and completely, though the soul should attain to such a transformation of love as shall be spiritual marriage, which is the highest state it can reach in this life; because all this is but an outline of love compared with the perfect image of transformation in glory. Yet, when this outline of transformation is attained in this life, it is a grand blessing, because the Beloved is so greatly pleased therewith. He desires, therefore, that the bride should have Him thus delineated in her soul, and says to her, "Put Me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm."<sup>2</sup> The heart here signifies the soul, wherein God in this life dwells as an impression of the seal of faith, and the arm is the resolute will, where He is as the impressed token of love.

10. Such is the state of the soul at that time. I speak but little of it, not willing to leave it altogether untouched, though no language can describe it.

11. The very substance of soul and body seems to be dried up by thirst after this living well of God, for the thirst resembles that of David when he cried out, "As the hart longs for the fountains of waters, so my soul longs for You, O God. My soul has thirsted after the strong living God; when shall I come and appear before the face of God?"<sup>3</sup> So oppressive is this thirst to the soul, that it counts it as nothing to break through the camp of the Philistines, like the valiant men of David, to fill its pitcher with "water out of the cisterns of Bethlehem,"<sup>4</sup> which is Christ. The trials of this world, the rage of the devil, and the pains of hell are nothing to pass through, in order to plunge into this fathomless fountain of love.

12. To this we may apply those words in the Canticle: "Love is strong as death, jealousy is hard as hell."<sup>5</sup> It is incredible how vehement are the longings and sufferings of the soul when it sees itself on the point of testing this good, and at the same time sees it withheld; for the nearer the object desired, the greater the pangs of its denial: "Before I eat," says Job, "I sigh, and as it were overflowing waters so my roaring"<sup>6</sup> and hunger for food. God is meant here by food; for in proportion to the soul's longing for food, and its knowledge of God, is the pain it suffers now.

#### NOTE

---

<sup>1</sup> Gal. 2:20

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 8:6

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 41:1,2

<sup>4</sup> 1 Chr. 11:18

<sup>5</sup> Cant. 8:6

<sup>6</sup> Job 3:24

THE source of the grievous sufferings of the soul at this time is the consciousness of its own emptiness of God—while it is drawing nearer and nearer to Him—and also, the thick darkness with the spiritual fire, which dry and purify it, that, its purification ended, it may be united with God. For when God sends not forth a ray of supernatural light into the soul, He is to it intolerable darkness when He is even near to it in spirit, for the supernatural light by its very brightness obscures the mere natural light. David referred to this when he said: “Cloud and mist round about Him . . . a fire shall go before Him.”<sup>1</sup> And again: “He put darkness His covert; His tabernacle is round about Him, darksome waters in the clouds of the air. Because of the brightness in His sight the clouds passed, hail and coals of fire.”<sup>2</sup> The soul that approaches God feels Him to be all this more and more the further it advances, until He shall cause it to enter within His divine brightness through the transformation of love. But the comfort and consolations of God are, by His infinite goodness, proportional to the darkness and emptiness of the soul, as it is written, “As the darkness thereof, so also the light thereof.”<sup>3</sup> And because He humbles souls and wearies them, while He is exalting them and making them glorious, He sends into the soul, in the midst of its weariness, certain divine rays from Himself, in such gloriousness and strength of love as to stir it up from its very depths, and to change its whole natural condition. Thus, the soul, in great fear and natural awe, addresses the Beloved in the first words of the following stanza, the remainder of which is His answer:

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 96:2,3

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 17:12,13

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 138:12

## STANZA XIII

*Turn them away, O my Beloved!  
I am on the Wing.*

### THE BRIDEGROOM

*Return, My Dove!  
The wounded hart  
Looms on the hill  
In the air of your flight and is refreshed.*

### EXPLANATION

AMID those fervent affections of love, such as the soul has shown in the preceding stanzas, the Beloved is wont to visit His bride, tenderly, lovingly, and with great strength of love; for ordinarily the graces and visits of God are great in proportion to the greatness of those fervors and longings of love which have gone before. And, as the soul has so anxiously longed for the divine eyes—as in the foregoing stanza—the Beloved reveals to it some glimpses of His majesty and Godhead, according to its desires. These divine rays strike the soul so profoundly and so vividly that it is rapt into an ecstasy which in the beginning is attended with great suffering and natural fear. Hence the soul, unable to bear the ecstasies in a body so frail, cries out, “Turn away your eyes from me.”

*“Turn them away, O my Beloved!”*

2. That is, “Your divine eyes, for they make me fly away out of myself to the heights of contemplation, and my natural force cannot bear it.” This the soul says because it thinks it has escaped from the burden of the flesh, which was the object of its desires; it therefore prays the Beloved to turn away His eyes; that is, not to show them in the body where it cannot bear and enjoy them as it would, but to show them to it in its flight from the body. The Bridegroom at once denies the request and hinders the flight, saying, “Return, My Dove! for the communications I make to you now are not those of the state of glory wherein you desire to be; but return to Me, for I am He Whom you, wounded with love, are seeking, and I, too, as the hart, wounded with your love, begin to show Myself to you on the heights of contemplation, and am refreshed and delighted by the love which your contemplation involves.” The soul then says to the Bridegroom:

*“Turn them away, O my Beloved!”*

3. The soul, because of its intense longing after the divine eyes—that is, the Godhead—receives interiorly from the Beloved such communications and knowledge of God as compel it to cry out, “Turn them away, O my Beloved!” For such is the wretchedness of our mortal nature, that we cannot bear—even when it is offered to us—but at the cost of our life, that which is the very life of the soul, and the object of its earnest desires, namely, the knowledge of the Beloved. Thus the soul is compelled to say, with regard to the eyes so earnestly, so anxiously

sought for, and in so many ways—when they become visible—”Turn them away.”

4. So great, at times, is the suffering of the soul during these ecstatic visitations—and there is no other pain which so wrenches the very bones, and which so oppresses our natural forces—that, were it not for the special interference of God, death would ensue. And, in truth, such is it to the soul, the subject of these visitations, for it feels as if it were released from the body and a stranger to the flesh. Such graces cannot be perfectly received in the body, because the spirit of man is lifted up to the communion of the Spirit of God, Who visits the soul, and must therefore of necessity be in some measure a stranger to the body. Hence it is that the flesh has to suffer, and consequently the soul in it, by reason of their union in one person. The great agony of the soul, therefore, in these visitations, and the great fear that overwhelms it when God deals with it in the supernatural way,<sup>1</sup> force it to cry out, “Turn them away, O my Beloved!”

5. But it is not to be supposed, however, that the soul really wishes Him to turn away His eyes; for this is nothing else but the expression of natural awe, as I said before.<sup>2</sup> Yes, rather, cost they what they may, the soul would not willingly miss these visitations and favors of the Beloved; for though nature may suffer, the spirit flies to this supernatural recollection in order to enjoy the spirit of the Beloved, the object of its prayers and desires. The soul is unwilling to receive these visitations in the body, when it cannot have the perfect fruition of them, and only in a slight degree and in pain; but it covets them in the flight of the disembodied spirit when it can enjoy them freely. Hence it says, “Turn them away, my Beloved”—that is, Do not visit me in the flesh.

*“I am on the wing.”*

6. It is as if it said, “I am taking my flight out of the body, that You may show them when I shall have left it; they being the cause of my flight out of the body.” For the better understanding of the nature of this flight we should consider that which I said just now.<sup>3</sup> In this visitation of the divine Spirit the spirit of the soul is with great violence borne upwards into communion with the divine, the body is abandoned, all its acts and senses are suspended, because they are absorbed in God. Thus the Apostle, St. Paul, speaking of his own ecstasy, says, “Whether in the body or out of the body, I cannot tell.”<sup>4</sup> But we are not to suppose that the soul abandons the body, and that the natural life is destroyed, but only that its actions have then ceased.

7. This is the reason why the body remains insensible in raptures and ecstasies, and unconscious of the most painful inflictions. These are not like the swoons and faintings of the natural life, which cease when pain begins. They who have not arrived at perfection are liable to these visitations, for they happen to those who are walking in the way of proficients. They who are already perfect receive these visitations in peace and in the sweetness of love: ecstasies cease, for they were only graces to prepare them for this greater grace.

---

<sup>1</sup> See St. Teresa, ‘Life,’ ch. 20 sect. 16, or ‘Las Mordadas,’ 6. ch. 11.

<sup>2</sup> Sect. 1. above.

<sup>3</sup> Sect. 4. above.

<sup>4</sup> 2 Cor. 12:3

8. This is a fitting place for discussing the difference between raptures, ecstasies, other elevations and subtle flights of the spirit, to which spiritual persons are liable; but, as I intend to do nothing more than explain briefly this canticle, as I undertook in the prologue, I leave the subject for those who are better qualified than I am. I do this the more readily, because our mother, the blessed Teresa of Jesus, has written admirably on this matter,<sup>1</sup> whose writings I hope in God to see published soon. The flight of the soul in this place, then, is to be understood of ecstasy, and elevation of spirit in God. The Beloved immediately says:

*“Return, My Dove.”*

9. The soul was joyfully quitting the body in its spiritual flight, thinking that its natural life was over, and that it was about to enter into the everlasting fruition of the Bridegroom, and remain with Him without a veil between them. He, however, restrains it in its flight, saying:

*“Return, My Dove.”*

10. It is as if He said, “O My Dove, in your high and rapid flight of contemplation, in the love with which you are inflamed, in the simplicity of your regard”—these are three characteristics of the dove—“return from that flight in which you aim at the true fruition of Myself—the time is not yet come for knowledge so high—return, and submit yourself to that lower degree of it which I communicate in this your rapture.”

*“The wounded hart.”*

11. The Bridegroom likens Himself to a hart, for by the hart here He means Himself. The hart by nature climbs up to high places, and when wounded hastens to seek relief in the cooling waters. If he hears his consort moan and sees that she is wounded, he runs to her at once, comforts, and caresses her. So the Bridegroom now; for, seeing the bride wounded with His love, He, too, hearing her moaning, is wounded Himself with her love; for with lovers the wound of one is the wound of the other, and they have the same feelings in common. The Bridegroom, therefore, says in effect: “Return, my bride, to Me; for as you are wounded with the love of Me, I too, like the hart, am wounded by love for you. I am like the hart, looming on the top of the hill.” Therefore He says:

*“Looms on the hill.”*

12. That is, “on the heights of contemplation, to which you have ascended in your flight.” Contemplation is a lofty eminence where God, in this life, begins to communicate Himself to the soul, and to show Himself, but not distinctly. Hence it is said, “Looms on the hill,” because He does not appear clearly. However profound the knowledge of Himself which God may grant to the soul in this life, it is, after all, but an indistinct vision. We now come to the third property of the hart, the subject of the line that follows:

*“In the air of your flight, and is refreshed.”*

---

<sup>1</sup> See ‘Relation’ 8.

13. The flight is contemplation in the ecstasy spoken of before,<sup>1</sup> and the air is the spirit of love produced in the soul by this flight of contemplation, and this love produced by the flight is here with great propriety called “air,” for the Holy Spirit also is likened to air in the Sacred Writings, because He is the breath of the Father and the Son. And so as He is there the air of the flight—that is, that He proceeds by the will from the contemplation and wisdom of the Father and the Son, and is breathed—so here the love of the soul is called air by the Bridegroom, because it proceeds from the contemplation of God and the knowledge of Him which at this time is possessed by the soul.

14. We must observe here that the Bridegroom does not say that He comes at the flight, but at the air of the flight, because properly speaking God does not communicate Himself to the soul because of that flight, which is, as I have said, the knowledge it has of God, but because of the love which is the fruit of that knowledge. For as love is the union of the Father and the Son, so is it also of God and the soul.

15. Hence it is that notwithstanding the most profound knowledge of God, and contemplation itself, together with the knowledge of all mysteries, the soul without love is worth nothing, and can do nothing, as the Apostle says, towards its union with God.<sup>2</sup> In another place he says, “Have charity, which is the bond of perfection.”<sup>3</sup> This charity then and love of the soul make the Bridegroom run to drink of the fountain of the Bride’s love, as the cooling waters attract the thirsty and the wounded hart, to be refreshed therein.

*“And is refreshed.”*

16. As the air cools and refreshes him who is wearied with the heat, so the air of love refreshes and comforts him who burns with the fire of love. The fire of love has this property, the air which cools and refreshes it is an increase of the fire itself. To him who loves, love is a flame that burns with the desire of burning more and more, like the flame of material fire. The consummation of this desire of burning more and more, with the love of the bride, which is the air of her flight, is here called refreshment. The Bridegroom says in substance, “I burn more and more because of the ardor of your flight, for love kindles love.”

17. God does not establish His grace and love in the soul but in proportion to the good will of that soul’s love. He, therefore, that truly loves God must strive that his love fail not; for so, if we may thus speak, will he move God to show him greater love, and to take greater delight in his soul. In order to attain to such a degree of love, he must practice those things of which the Apostle speaks, saying: “Charity is patient, is benign: charity envies not, deals not perversely; is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeks not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinks not evil, rejoices not upon iniquity, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”<sup>4</sup>

#### NOTE

---

<sup>1</sup> Sect. 1.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. 13:2

<sup>3</sup> Col. 3:14

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. 13:4-7

WHEN the dove—that is the soul—was flying on the gale of love over the waters of the deluge of the weariness and longing of its love, “not finding where her foot might rest,”<sup>1</sup> the compassionate father Noah, in this last flight, put forth the hand of his mercy, caught her, and brought her into the ark of his charity and love. That took place when the Bridegroom, as in the stanza now explained, said, “Return, My Dove.” In the shelter within the ark, the soul, finding all it desired, and more than it can ever express, begins to sing the praises of the Beloved, celebrating the magnificence which it feels and enjoys in that union, saying:

---

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 8:9

## STANZAS XIV, XV

### THE BRIDE

*My Beloved is the mountains,  
The solitary wooded valleys,  
The strange islands,  
The roaring torrents,  
The whisper of the amorous gales;*

*The tranquil night  
At the approaches of the dawn,  
The silent music,  
The murmuring solitude,  
The supper which revives, and enkindles love.*

BEFORE I begin to explain these stanzas, I must observe, in order that they and those which follow may be better understood, that this spiritual flight signifies a certain high estate and union of love, to which, after many spiritual exercises, God is wont to elevate the soul: it is called the spiritual betrothal of the Word, the Son of God. In the beginning, when this occurs the first time, God reveals to it great things of Himself, makes it beautiful in majesty and grandeur, adorns it with graces and gifts, and endows it with honor, and with the knowledge of Himself, as a bride is adorned on the day of her betrothal. On this happy day the soul not only ceases from its anxieties and loving complaints, but is, moreover, adorned with all grace, entering into a state of peace and delight, and of the sweetness of love, as it appears from these stanzas, in which it does nothing else but recount and praise the magnificence of the Beloved, which it recognizes in Him, and enjoys in the union of the betrothal.

2. In the stanzas that follow, the soul speaks no more of its anxieties and sufferings, as before, but of the sweet and peaceful intercourse of love with the Beloved; for now all its troubles are over. These two stanzas, which I am about to explain, contain all that God is wont at this time to bestow upon the soul; but we are not to suppose that all souls, thus far advanced, receive all that is here described, either in the same way or in the same degree of knowledge and of consciousness. Some souls receive more, others less; some in one way, some in another; and yet all may be in the state of spiritual betrothal. But in this stanza the highest possible is spoken of, because that embraces all.

### EXPLANATION

3. As in the ark of Noah there were many chambers for the different kinds of animals, as the Sacred Writings tell us, and "all food that may be eaten,"<sup>1</sup> so the soul, in its flight to the divine ark of the bosom of God, sees therein not only the many mansions of which our Lord speaks, but also all the food, that is, all the magnificence in which the soul may rejoice, and which are here referred to by the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 6:21



common terms of these stanzas. These are substantially as follows:

4. In this divine union the soul has a vision and foretaste of abundant and inestimable riches, and finds there all the repose and refreshment it desired; it attains to the secrets of God, and to a strange knowledge of Him, which is the food of those who know Him most; it is conscious of the awful power of God beyond all other power and might, tastes of the wonderful sweetness and delight of the Spirit, finds its true rest and divine light, drinks deeply of the wisdom of God, which shines forth in the harmony of the creatures and works of God; it feels itself filled with all good, emptied, and delivered from all evil, and, above all, rejoices consciously in the inestimable banquet of love which confirms it in love. This is the substance of these two stanzas.

5. The bride here says that her Beloved in Himself and to her is all the objects she enumerates; for in the ecstatic communications of God the soul feels and understands the truth of the saying of St. Francis: "God is mine and all things are mine." And because God is all, and the soul, and the good of all, the communication in this ecstasy is explained by the consideration that the goodness of the creatures referred to in these stanzas is a reflection of His goodness, as will appear from every line thereof. All that is here set forth is in God eminently in an infinite way, or rather, every one of these grandeurs is God, and all of them together are God. Inasmuch as the soul is one with God, it feels all things to be God according to the words of St. John: "What was made, in Him was life."<sup>1</sup>

6. But we are not to understand this consciousness of the soul as if it saw the creatures in God as we see material objects in the light, but that it feels all things to be God in this fruition of Him; neither are we to imagine that the soul sees God essentially and clearly because it has so deep a sense of Him; for this is only a strong and abundant communication from Him, a glimmering light of what He is in Himself, by which the soul discerns this goodness of all things, as I proceed to explain.

*"My Beloved is the mountains."*

7. Mountains are high fertile, extensive, beautiful, lovely, flowery, and odorous. These mountains my Beloved is to me.

*"The solitary wooded valleys."*

8. Solitary valleys are tranquil, pleasant, cooling, shady, abounding in sweet waters, and by the variety of trees growing in them, and by the melody of the birds that frequent them, enliven and delight the senses; their solitude and silence procure us a refreshing rest. These valleys my Beloved is to me.

*"The strange islands."*

9. Strange islands are girt by the sea; they are also, because of the sea, distant and unknown to the commerce of men. They produce things very different from those with which we are conversant, in strange ways, and with qualities hitherto unknown, so as to surprise those who behold them, and fill them with wonder.

---

<sup>1</sup> John 1:3,4. See Stanza viii.

Thus, then, by reason of the great and marvelous wonders, and the strange things that come to our knowledge, far beyond the common notions of men, which the soul beholds in God, it calls Him the strange islands. We say of a man that he is strange for one of two reasons: either because he withdraws himself from the society of his fellows, or because he is singular or distinguished in his life and conduct. For these two reasons together God is called strange by the soul. He is not only all that is strange in undiscovered islands, but His ways, judgments, and works are also strange, new, and marvelous to men.

10. It is nothing wonderful that God should be strange to men who have never seen Him, seeing that He is also strange to the holy angels and the souls who see Him; for they neither can nor shall ever see Him perfectly. Yes, even to the day of the last judgment they will see in Him so much that is new in His deep judgments, in His acts of mercy and justice, as to excite their wonder more and more. Thus God is the strange islands not to men only, but to the angels also; only to Himself is He neither strange nor new.

*“The roaring torrents.”*

11. Torrents have three properties. 1. They overflow all that is in their course. 2. They fill all hollows. 3. They overpower all other sounds by their own. And hence the soul, feeling most sweetly that these three properties belong to God, says, “My Beloved is the roaring torrents.”

12. As to the first property of which the soul is conscious, it feels itself to be so overwhelmed with the torrent of the Spirit of God, and so violently overpowered by it, that all the waters in the world seem to it to have surrounded it, and to have drowned all its former actions and passions. Though all this is violent, yet there is nothing painful in it, for these rivers are rivers of peace, as it is written, God, speaking through Isaiah, saying, “I will decline upon her, as it were, a flood of peace, and as a torrent overflowing glory.”<sup>1</sup> That is, “I will bring upon the soul, as it were, a river of peace, and a torrent overflowing with glory.” Thus this divine overflowing, like roaring torrents, fills the soul with peace and glory. The second property the soul feels is that this divine water is now filling the vessels of its humility and the emptiness of its desires, as it is written: “He has exalted the humble, and filled the hungry with good.”<sup>2</sup> The third property of which the soul is now conscious in the roaring torrents of the Beloved is a spiritual sound and voice overpowering all other sounds and voices in the world. The explanation of this will take a little time.

13. This voice, or this murmuring sound of the waters, is an overflowing so abundant as to fill the soul with good, and a power so mighty seizing upon it as to seem not only the sound of many waters, but a most loud roaring of thunder. But the voice is a spiritual voice, unattended by material sounds or the pain and torment of them, but rather with majesty, power, might, delight, and glory: it is, as it were, a voice, an infinite interior sound which endows the soul with power and might. The Apostles heard in spirit this voice when the Holy Spirit descended upon them in the sound “as of a mighty wind,”<sup>3</sup> as we read in the Acts of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 66:12

<sup>2</sup> Luke 1:52

<sup>3</sup> Acts 2:2

Apostles. In order to manifest this spiritual voice, interiorly spoken, the sound was heard exteriorly, as of a rushing wind, by all those who were in Jerusalem. This exterior manifestation reveals what the Apostles interiorly received, namely, fullness of power and might.

14. So also when our Lord Jesus prayed to the Father because of His distress and the rage of His enemies, He heard an interior voice from heaven, comforting Him in His Sacred Humanity. The sound, solemn and grave, was heard exteriorly by the Jews, some of whom said that it thundered: others said, "An angel has spoken to Him."<sup>1</sup> The voice outwardly heard was the outward sign and expression of that strength and power which Christ then inwardly received in His human nature. We are not to suppose that the soul does not hear in spirit the spiritual voice because it is also outwardly heard. The spiritual voice is the effect on the soul of the audible voice, as material sounds strike the ear, and impress the meaning of it on the mind. This we learn from David when he said, "He will give to His voice the voice of strength;"<sup>2</sup> this strength is the interior voice. He will give to His voice—that is, the outward voice, audibly heard—the voice of strength which is felt within. God is an infinite voice, and communicating Himself thus to the soul produces the effect of an infinite voice.

15. This voice was heard by St. John, saying in the Revelation, "I heard a voice from heaven as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of great thunder." And, lest it should be supposed that a voice so strong was distressing and harsh, he adds immediately, "The voice which I heard was as the voice of harpers harping on their harps."<sup>3</sup> Ezekiel says that this sound as of many waters was "as it were the sound of the High God,"<sup>4</sup> profoundly and sweetly communicated in it. This voice is infinite, because, as I have said, it is God Who communicates Himself, speaking in the soul; but He adapts Himself to each soul, uttering the voice of strength according to its capacity, in majesty and joy. And so the bride sings in the Canticle: "Let Your voice sound in my ears, for Your voice is sweet."<sup>5</sup>

*"The whisper of the amorous gales."*

16. Two things are to be considered here—gales and whisper. The amorous gales are the virtues and graces of the Beloved, which, because of its union with the Bridegroom, play around the soul, and, most lovingly sent forth, touch it in their own substance. The whisper of the gales is a most sublime and sweet knowledge of God and of His attributes, which overflows into the understanding from the contact of the attributes of God with the substance of the soul. This is the highest delight of which the soul is capable in this life.

17. That we may understand this the better, we must keep in mind that as in a gale two things are observable—the touch of it, and the whisper or sound—so there are two things observable also in the communications of the Bridegroom—the sense of delight, and the understanding of it. As the touch of the air is felt in the sense of touch, and the whisper of it heard in the ear, so also the contact of the

---

<sup>1</sup> John 12:29

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 67:34

<sup>3</sup> Rev. 14:2

<sup>4</sup> Ezek. 1:24

<sup>5</sup> Cant. 2:14

perfections of the Beloved is felt and enjoyed in the touch of the soul—that is, in the substance thereof, through the instrumentality of the will; and the knowledge of the attributes of God felt in the hearing of the soul—that is, in the understanding.

18. The gale is said to blow amorously when it strikes deliciously, satisfying his desire who is longing for the refreshing which it ministers; for it then revives and soothes the sense of touch, and while the sense of touch is thus soothed, that of hearing also rejoices and delights in the sound and whisper of the gale more than the touch in the contact of the air, because the sense of hearing is more spiritual, or, to speak with greater correctness, is more nearly connected with the spiritual than is that of touch, and the delight thereof is more spiritual than is that of the touch. So also, inasmuch as this touch of God greatly satisfies and comforts the substance of the soul, sweetly fulfilling its longing to be received into union; this union, or touch, is called amorous gales, because, as I said before, the perfections of the Beloved are by it communicated to the soul lovingly and sweetly, and through it the whisper of knowledge to the understanding. It is called whisper, because, as the whisper of the air penetrates subtly into the organ of hearing, so this most subtle and delicate knowledge enters with marvelous sweetness and delight into the inmost substance of the soul, which is the highest of all delights.

19. The reason is that substantial knowledge is now communicated intelligibly, and stripped of all accidents and images, to the understanding, which philosophers call passive or passible, because inactive without any natural efforts of its own during this communication. This is the highest delight of the soul, because it is in the understanding, which is the seat of fruition, as theologians teach, and fruition is the vision of God. Some theologians think, inasmuch as this whisper signifies the substantial intelligence, that our father Elijah had a vision of God in the delicate whisper of the air, which he heard on the mount at the mouth of the cave. The Holy Scripture calls it “the whistling of a gentle wind,”<sup>1</sup> because knowledge is begotten in the understanding by the subtle and delicate communication of the Spirit. The soul calls it here the whisper of the amorous gales, because it flows into the understanding from the loving communication of the perfections of the Beloved. This is why it is called the whisper of the amorous gales.

20. This divine whisper which enters in by the ear of the soul is not only substantial knowledge, but a manifestation also of the truths of the Divinity, and a revelation of the secret mysteries thereof. For in general, in the Holy Scriptures, every communication of God said to enter in by the ear is a manifestation of pure truths to the understanding, or a revelation of the secrets of God. These are revelations on purely spiritual visions, and are communicated directly to the soul without the intervention of the senses, and thus, what God communicates through the spiritual ear is most profound and most certain. When St. Paul would express the greatness of the revelations made to him, he did not say, “I saw or I perceived secret words,” but “I heard secret words which it is not granted to man to utter.”<sup>2</sup> It is thought that St. Paul also saw God, as our father Elijah, in the whisper of a gentle air. For as “faith comes by hearing”—so the Apostle teaches—that is, by the hearing of the material ear, so also that which the faith

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 19:12

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 12:4

teaches, the intelligible truth, comes by spiritual hearing.

21. The prophet Job, speaking to God, when He revealed Himself to him, teaches the same doctrine, saying, "With the hearing of the ear I have heard You, but now my eye sees You."<sup>1</sup> It is clear, from this, that to hear with the ear of the soul is to see with the eye of the passive understanding. He does not say, "I heard with the hearing of my ears," but "with the hearing of my ear"; nor, "with the seeing of my eyes," but "with the eye of my understanding"; the hearing of the soul is, therefore, the vision of the understanding.

22. Still, we are not to think that what the soul perceives, though pure truth, can be the perfect and clear fruition of Heaven. For though it is free from accidents, as I said before,<sup>2</sup> it is dim and not clear, because it is contemplation, which in this life, as St. Dionysius says, "is a ray of darkness,"<sup>3</sup> and thus we may say that it is a ray and an image of fruition, because it is in the understanding, which is the seat of fruition. This substantial truth, called here a whisper, is the "eyes desired" which the Beloved showed to the bride, who, unable to bear the vision, cried, "Turn them away, O my Beloved."<sup>4</sup>

23. There is a passage in the book of Job which greatly confirms what I have said of rapture and betrothal, and, because I consider it to be much to the purpose, I will give it here, though it may delay us a little, and explain those portions of it which belong to my subject. The explanation shall be short, and when I shall have made it, I shall go on to explain the other stanza. The passage is as follows: "To me there was spoken a secret word," said Eliphaz the Themanite, "and, as it were, my ear by stealth received the veins of its whisper. In the horror of a vision by night, when deep sleep is wont to hold men, fear held me and trembling, and all my bones were made sore afraid: and when the spirit passed before me the hair of my flesh stood upright. There stood one whose countenance I knew not, an image before my eyes, and I heard the voice, as it were, of a gentle wind."<sup>5</sup>

24. This passage contains almost all I said about rapture in the thirteenth stanza, where the bride says: "Turn them away, O my Beloved." The "word spoken in secret" to Eliphaz is that secret communication which by reason of its greatness the soul was not able to endure, and, therefore, cried out: "Turn them away, O my Beloved." Eliphaz says that his "ear as it were by stealth received the veins of its whisper." By that is meant the pure substance which the understanding receives, for the "veins" here denote the interior substance. The whisper is that communication and touch of the virtues whereby the said substance is communicated to the understanding. It is called a whisper because of its great gentleness. And the soul calls it the amorous gales because it is lovingly communicated. It is said to be received as it were by stealth, for as that which is stolen is alienated, so this secret is alien to man, speaking in the order of nature, because that which he received does not appertain to him naturally, and thus it was not lawful for him to receive it; neither was it lawful for St. Paul to repeat what he heard. For this reason the prophet says twice, "My secret to myself, my

---

<sup>1</sup> Job 42:5

<sup>2</sup> Sect. 20.

<sup>3</sup> 'De Mystica Theologia,' ch. i.

<sup>4</sup> Cant. 6:4

<sup>5</sup> Job 4:12-16

secret to myself.”<sup>1</sup>

25. When Eliphaz speaks of the horror of the vision by night, and of the fear and trembling that seized upon him, he refers to the awe and dread that comes upon the soul naturally in rapture, because in its natural strength it is unable, as I said before,<sup>2</sup> to endure the communication of the Spirit of God. The prophet gives us to understand that, as when sleep is about to fall upon men, a certain vision which they call a nightmare is wont to oppress and terrify them in the interval between sleeping and waking, which is the moment of the approach of sleep, so in the spiritual passage between the sleep of natural ignorance and the waking of the supernatural understanding, which is the beginning of an ecstasy or rapture, the spiritual vision then revealed makes the soul fear and tremble.

26. “All my bones were affrighted”; that is, were shaken and disturbed. By this he meant a certain dislocation of the bones which takes place when the soul falls into an ecstasy. This is clearly expressed by Daniel when he saw the angel, saying, “O my lord, at the sight of you my joints are loosed.”<sup>3</sup> “When the spirit passed before me”—that is, “When my spirit was made to transcend the ways and limitations of nature in ecstasies and raptures”—“the hair of my flesh stood upright”; that is, “my body was chilled, and the flesh contracted, like that of a dead man.”

27. “There stood One”—that is God, Who reveals Himself after this manner—“Whose countenance knew not”: in these communications or visions, however high they may be, the soul neither knows nor beholds the face and being of God. “An image before my eyes”; that is, the knowledge of the secret words was most deep, as it were the image and face of God; but still this is not the essential vision of God. “I heard the voice, as it were, of a gentle wind”; this is the whisper of the amorous gales—that is, of the Beloved of the soul.

28. But it is not to be supposed that these visits of God are always attended by such terrors and distress of nature: that happens to them only who are entering the state of illumination and perfection, and in this kind of communication; for in others they come with great sweetness.

---

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 24:16

<sup>2</sup> Stan. xiii. sect. 1.

<sup>3</sup> Dan. 10:16

## STANZA XV

“THE tranquil night.” In this spiritual sleep in the bosom of the Beloved the soul is in possession and fruition of all the calm, repose, and quiet of a peaceful night, and receives at the same time in God a certain dim, unfathomable divine intelligence. This is the reason why it says that the Beloved is to it the tranquil night.

2. “At the approaches of the dawn.” This tranquil night is not like a night of darkness, but rather like the night when the sunrise is drawing nigh. This tranquillity and repose in God is not all darkness to the soul, as the dark night is, but rather tranquillity and repose in the divine light and in a new knowledge of God, whereby the mind, most sweetly tranquil, is raised to a divine light.

3. This divine light is here very appropriately called the approaches of the dawn, that is, the twilight; for as the twilight of the morn disperses the darkness of the night and reveals the light of day, so the mind, tranquil and reposing in God, is raised up from the darkness of natural knowledge to the morning light of the supernatural knowledge of God; not clear, indeed, as I have said, but dim, like the night at the approaches of the dawn. For as it is then neither wholly night nor wholly day, but, as they say, twilight, so this solitude and divine repose is neither perfectly illumined by the divine light nor yet perfectly alien from it.

4. In this tranquillity the understanding is lifted up in a strange way above its natural comprehension to the divine light: it is like a man who, after a profound sleep, opens his eyes to unexpected light. This knowledge is referred to by David when he says, “I have watched, and am become as the lonely sparrow on the housetop”;<sup>1</sup> that is, “I opened the eyes of my understanding and was raised up above all natural comprehension, lonely, without them, on the housetop, lifted up above all earthly considerations.” He says that he was “become as the lonely sparrow,” because in this kind of contemplation, the spirit has the properties of the sparrow. These are five in number:

i. It frequents in general high places; and the spirit, in this state, rises to the highest contemplation.

ii. It is ever turning its face in the direction of the wind, and the spirit turns its affections thither whence comes the spirit of love, which is God.

iii. It is in general solitary, abstaining from the companionship of others, and flying away when any approach it: so the spirit, in contemplation, is far away from all worldly thoughts, lonely in its avoidance of them; neither does it consent to anything except to this solitude in God.

iv. It sings most sweetly, and so also does the spirit at this time sing to God; for the praises which it offers up proceed from the sweetest love, most pleasing to itself, and most precious in the sight of God.

v. It is of no definite color; so also is the perfect spirit, which in this ecstasy is not only without any tinge of sensual affection or self-love, but also without any particular consideration of the things of heaven or earth; neither can it give any account whatever of them, because it has entered into the abyss of the knowledge

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 101:8

of God.

*“The silent music.”*

5. In this silence and tranquillity of the night, and in this knowledge of the divine light, the soul discerns a marvelous arrangement and disposition of God's wisdom in the diversities of His creatures and operations. All these, and each one of them, have a certain correspondence with God, whereby each, by a voice peculiar to itself, proclaims what there is in itself of God, so as to form a concert of sublimest melody, transcending all the harmonies of the world. This is the silent music, because it is knowledge tranquil and calm, without audible voice; and thus the sweetness of music and the repose of silence are enjoyed in it. The soul says that the Beloved is silent music, because this harmony of spiritual music is in Him understood and felt. He is not this only, He is also—

*“The murmuring solitude.”*

6. This is almost the same as the silent music. For though the music is inaudible to the senses and the natural powers, it is a solitude most full of sound to the spiritual powers. These powers being in solitude, emptied of all forms and natural apprehensions, may well receive in spirit, like a resounding voice, the spiritual impression of the majesty of God in Himself and in His creatures; as it happened to St. John, who heard in spirit as it were “the voice of harpers harping on their harps.”<sup>1</sup> St. John heard this in spirit: it was not material harps that he heard, but a certain knowledge that he had of the praises of the blessed, which every one of them, each in his own degree of glory, is continually singing before God. It is as it were music. For as every one of the saints had the gifts of God in a different way, so every one of them sings His praises in a different way, and yet all harmonize in one concert of love, as in music.

7. In the same way, in this tranquil contemplation, the soul beholds all creatures, not only the highest, but the lowest also, each one according to the gift of God to it, sending forth the voice of its witness to what God is. It beholds each one magnifying Him in its own way, and possessing Him according to its particular capacity; and thus all these voices together unite in one strain in praise of God's greatness, wisdom, and marvelous knowledge. This is the meaning of those words of the Holy Spirit in the Book of Wisdom: “The Spirit of our Lord has replenished the whole world, and that which contains all things has the knowledge of the voice.”<sup>2</sup> “The voice” is the murmuring solitude, which the soul is said to know, namely, the witness which all things bear to God. Inasmuch as the soul hears this music only in solitude and in estrangement from all outward things, it calls it silent music and murmuring solitude. These are the Beloved.

*“The supper which revives, and enkindles love.”*

8. Lovers find recreation, satisfaction, and love in feasts. And because the Beloved in this sweet communication produces these three effects in the soul, He is here said to be the supper that revives, and enkindles love. In Holy Scripture supper signifies the divine vision, for as supper is the conclusion of the day's labors, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Rev. 14:2

<sup>2</sup> Wisd. 1:7



the beginning of the night's repose, so the soul in this tranquil knowledge is made to feel that its trials are over, the possession of good begun, and its love of God increased. Hence, then, the Beloved is to the soul the supper that revives, in being the end of its trials, and that enkindles love, in being the beginning of the fruition of all good.

9. That we may see more clearly how the Bridegroom is the supper of the soul, we must refer to those words of the Beloved in the Revelation: "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man shall hear My voice, and open to Me the gate, I will enter into him, and will sup with him, and he with Me."<sup>1</sup> It is evident from these words that He brings the supper with Him, which is nothing else but His own sweetness and delights, wherein He rejoices Himself, and which He, uniting Himself to the soul, communicates to it, making it a partaker of His joy: for this is the meaning of "I will sup with him, and he with Me." These words describe the effect of the divine union of the soul with God, wherein it shares the very goods of God Himself, Who communicates them graciously and abundantly to it. Thus the Beloved is Himself the supper which revives, and enkindles love, refreshing the soul with His abundance, and enkindling its love in His graciousness.

10. But before I proceed to explain the stanzas which follow, I must observe that, in the state of betrothal, wherein the soul enjoys this tranquillity, and wherein it receives all that it can receive in this life, we are not to suppose its tranquillity to be perfect, but that the higher part of it is tranquil; for the sensual part, except in the state of spiritual marriage, never loses all its imperfect habits, and its powers are never wholly subdued, as I shall show hereafter.<sup>2</sup> What the soul receives now is all that it can receive in the state of betrothal, for in that of the marriage the blessings are greater. Though the bride-soul has great joy in these visits of the Beloved in the state of betrothal, still it has to suffer from His absence, to endure trouble and afflictions in the lower part, and at the hands of the devil. But all this ceases in the state of spiritual marriage.

#### NOTE

THE bride now in possession of the virtues in their perfection, whereby she is ordinarily rejoicing in peace when the Beloved visits her, is now and then in the fruition of the fragrance and sweetness of those virtues in the highest degree, because the Beloved touches them within her, just as the sweetness and beauty of the lilies and other flowers when in their bloom are perceived when we handle them. For in many of these visits the soul discerns within itself all its virtues which God has given it; He shedding light upon them. The soul now, with marvelous joy and sweetness of love, binds them together and presents them to the Beloved as a nosegay of beautiful flowers, and the Beloved in accepting them—for He truly accepts them then—accepts thereby a great service. All this takes place within the soul, feeling that the Beloved is within it as on His own couch, for the soul presents itself with the virtues which is the greatest service it can render Him, and thus this is one of the greatest joys which in its interior conversation with God the soul is wont to receive in presents of this kind made to the Beloved.

2. The devil, beholding this prosperity of the soul, and in his great malice envying

<sup>1</sup> Rev. 3:20

<sup>2</sup> Stanza xxvi.

all the good he sees in it, now uses all his power, and has recourse to all his devices, in order to thwart it, if possible, even in the slightest degree. He thinks it of more consequence to keep back the soul, even for an instant, from this abundance, bliss, and delight, than to make others fall into many and mortal sins. Other souls have little or nothing to lose, while this soul has much, having gained many and great treasures; for the loss of one grain of refined gold is greater than the loss of many of the baser metals.

3. The devil here has recourse to the sensual appetites, though now they can give him generally but little or no help because they are mortified, and because he cannot turn them to any great account in distracting the imagination. Sometimes he stirs up many movements in the sensitive part of the soul, and causes other vexations, spiritual as well as sensual, from which the soul is unable to deliver itself until our Lord shall send His angel, as it is written, "The angel of the Lord shall put in himself about them that fear Him, and shall deliver them;"<sup>1</sup> and so establish peace, both in the spiritual and sensitive parts of the soul. With a view to show forth this truth, and to ask this favor, the soul, apprehensive by experience of the craft which the devil makes use of to thwart this good, addressing itself to the angels, whose function it is to succor it at this time by putting the evil spirits to flight, speaks as in the following stanza:

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 33:8

## STANZA XVI

*Catch us the foxes,  
For our vineyard has flourished;  
While of roses  
We make a nosegay,  
And let no one appear on the hill.*

THE soul, anxious that this interior delight of love, which is the flowers of the vineyard, should not be interrupted, either by envious and malicious devils, or the raging desires of sensuality, or the various comings and goings of the imagination, or any other consciousness or presence of created things, calls upon the angels to seize and hinder all these from interrupting its practice of interior love, in the joy and sweetness of which the soul and the Son of God communicate and delight in the virtues and graces.

*“Catch us the foxes, for our vineyard has flourished.”*

2. The vineyard is the plantation in this holy soul of all the virtues which minister to it the wine of sweet taste. The vineyard of the soul is then flourishing when it is united in will to the Bridegroom, and delights itself in Him in all the virtues. Sometimes, as I have just said, the memory and the fancy are assailed by various forms and imaginings, and diverse motions and desires trouble the sensual part. The great variety and diversity of these made David say, when he felt the inconvenience and the trouble of them as he was drinking of the sweet wine of the spirit, thirsting greatly after God: “For You my soul has thirsted, for You my flesh, O how many ways.”<sup>1</sup>

3. Here the soul calls the whole troop of desires and stirrings of sense, foxes, because of the great resemblance between them at this time. As foxes pretend to be asleep that they may pounce upon their prey when it comes in their way, so all the desires and powers of sense in the soul are asleep until the flowers of virtue grow, flourish, and bloom. Then the desires and powers of sense awake to resist the Spirit and domineer. “The flesh lusts against the spirit,”<sup>2</sup> and as the inclination of it is towards the sensual desires, it is disgusted as soon as it tastes of the Spirit, and herein the desires prove extremely troublesome to spiritual sweetness.

*“Catch us the foxes.”*

4. The evil spirits now molest the soul in two ways. They vehemently excite the desires, and employ them with other imaginations to assail the peaceful and flourishing kingdom of the soul. Then—and this is much worse—when they do not succeed in stirring up the desires, they assail the soul with bodily pains and noises in order to distract it. And, what is still more serious, they fight with spiritual horror and dread, and sometimes with fearful torments, which, at this time, if God permits them, they can most effectually bring about, for inasmuch as

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 62:2

<sup>2</sup> Gal. 5:17

the soul is now spiritually detached, so as to perform its spiritual exercises, the devil being himself a spirit presents himself before it with great ease.

5. At other times the evil spirit assails the soul with other horrors, before it begins to have the fruition of the sweet flowers, when God is beginning to draw it forth out of the house of sense that it may enter on the interior exercises in the garden of the Bridegroom, for he knows well that once entered into this state of recollection it is there so protected that, notwithstanding all he can do, he cannot hurt it. Very often, too, when the devil goes forth to meet the soul, the soul becomes quickly recollected in the secret depths of its interior, where it finds great sweetness and protection; then those terrors of Satan are so far off that they not only produce no fear, but are even the occasion of peace and joy. The bride, in the Canticle, speaks of these terrors, saying, "My soul troubled me for the chariots of Aminadab."<sup>1</sup> Aminadab is the evil spirit, and his chariots are his assaults upon the soul, which he makes with great violence, noise, and confusion.

6. The bride also says what the soul says here, namely: "Catch us the little foxes that destroy the vineyards; for our vineyard has flourished."<sup>2</sup> She does not say, "Catch me" but "Catch us," because she is speaking of herself and the Beloved; for they are one, and enjoy the flourishing of the vineyard together.

7. The reason why the vineyard is said to be flourishing and not bearing fruit is this: the soul in this life has the fruition of virtues, however perfect they may be, only in their flower, because the fruit of them is reserved for the life to come.

*"While of roses we make a nosegay."*

8. Now, at this time, while the soul is rejoicing in the flourishing of the vineyard, and delighting itself in the bosom of the Beloved, all its virtues are perfect, exhibiting themselves to the soul, and sending forth great sweetness and delight. The soul feels them to be in itself and in God so as to seem to be one vineyard most flourishing and pleasing belonging to both, wherein they feed and delight. Then the soul binds all its virtues together, makes acts of love in each of them separately, and in all together, and then offers them all to the Beloved, with great tenderness of love and sweetness, and in this the Beloved helps it, for without His help and favor it cannot make this union and oblation of virtue to the Beloved. Hence it says, "We make a nosegay"—that is "the Beloved and myself."

9. This union of the virtues is called a nosegay; for as a nosegay is cone-like in form, and a cone is strong, containing and embracing many pieces firmly joined together, so this cone-like nosegay of the virtues which the soul makes for the Beloved is the uniform perfection of the soul which firmly and solidly contains and embraces many perfections, great virtues, and rich endowments; for all the perfections and virtues of the soul unite together to form but one. And while this perfection is being accomplished, and when accomplished, offered to the Beloved on the part of the soul, it becomes necessary to catch the foxes that they may not hinder this mutual interior communication. The soul prays not only that this nosegay may be carefully made, but also adds, "And let no one appear on the hill."

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 6:11

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 2:15

10. This divine interior exercise requires solitude and detachment from all things, whether in the lower part of the soul, which is that of sense, or in the higher, which is the rational. These two divisions comprise all the faculties and senses of man, and are here called the hill; because all our natural notions and desires being in them, as quarry on a hill, the devil lies in wait among these notions and desires, in order that he may injure the soul.

*“And let no one appear on the hill.”*

11. That is, let no representation or image of any object whatever, appertaining to any of these faculties or senses, appear in the presence of the soul and the Bridegroom: in other words, let the spiritual powers of the soul, memory, understanding, and will, be divested of all notions, particular inclinations, or considerations whatsoever; and let all the senses and faculties of the body, interior as well as exterior, the imagination, the fancy, the sight and hearing, and the rest, be divested of all occasions of distractions, of all forms, images, and representations, and of all other natural operations.

12. The soul speaks in this way because it is necessary for the perfect fruition of this communication of God, that all the senses and powers, both interior and exterior, should be disencumbered and emptied of their proper objects and operations; for the more active they are, the greater will be the hindrance which they will occasion. The soul having attained to a certain interior union of love, the spiritual faculties of it are no longer active, and still less those of the body; for now that the union of love is actually wrought in love, the faculties of the soul cease from their exertions, because now that the goal is reached all employment of means is at an end. What the soul at this time has to do is to wait lovingly upon God, and this waiting is love in a continuation of unitive love. Let no one, therefore, appear on the hill, but the will only waiting on the Beloved in the offering up of self and of all the virtues in the way described.

#### NOTE

FOR the clearer understanding of the following stanza, we must keep in mind that the absence of the Beloved, from which the soul suffers in the state of spiritual betrothal, is an exceedingly great affliction, and at times greater than all other trials whatever. The reason is this: the love of the soul for God is now so vehement and deep that the pain of His absence is vehement and deep also. This pain is increased also by the annoyance which comes from intercourse with creatures, which is very great; for the soul, under the pressure of its quickened desire of union with God, finds all other conversation most painful and difficult to endure. It is like a stone in its flight to the place whither it is rapidly tending; every obstacle it meets with occasions a violent shock. And as the soul has tasted of the sweetness of the Beloved's visits, which are more desirable than gold and all that is beautiful, it therefore dreads even a momentary absence, and addresses itself as follows to aridities, and to the Spirit of the Bridegroom:—

## STANZA XVII

*O killing north wind, cease!  
Come, south wind, that awakens love!  
Blow through my garden,  
And let its odors flow,  
And the Beloved shall feed among the flowers.*

BESIDE the causes mentioned in the foregoing stanza, spiritual dryness also hinders the fruition of this interior sweetness of which I have been speaking, and afraid of it the soul had recourse to two expedients, to which it refers in the present stanza. The first is to shut the door against it by unceasing prayer and devotion. The second, to invoke the Holy Spirit; it is He Who drives away dryness from the soul, maintains and increases its love of the Bridegroom—that He may establish in it the practice of virtue, and all this to the end that the Son of God, its Bridegroom, may rejoice and delight in it more and more, for its only aim is to please the Beloved.

*“Killing north wind, cease.”*

2. The north wind is exceedingly cold; it dries up and parches flowers and plants, and at the least, when it blows, causes them to draw in and shrink. So, dryness of spirit and the sensible absence of the Beloved, because they produce the same effect on the soul, exhausting the sweetness and fragrance of virtue, are here called the killing north wind; for all the virtues and affective devotions of the soul are then dead. Hence the soul addresses itself to it, saying, “Killing north wind, cease.” These words mean that the soul applies itself to spiritual exercise, in order to escape aridity. But the communications of God are now so interior that by no exertion of its faculties can the soul attain to them if the Spirit of the Bridegroom do not cause these movements of love. The soul, therefore, addresses Him, saying:

*“Come, south wind, that awakens love.”*

3. The south wind is another wind commonly called the south-west wind. It is soft, and brings rain; it makes the grass and plants grow, flowers to blossom and scatter their perfume abroad; in short, it is the very opposite in its effects of the north wind. By it is meant here the Holy Spirit, Who awakens love; for when this divine Breath breathes on the soul, it so inflames and refreshes it, so quickens the will, and stirs up the desires, which were before low and asleep as to the love of God, that we may well say of it that it quickens the love between Him and the soul. The prayer of the soul to the Holy Spirit is thus expressed, “Blow through my garden.”

4. This garden is the soul itself. For as the soul said of itself before, that it was a flourishing vineyard, because the flowers of virtue which are in it give forth the wine of sweetness, so here it says of itself that it is a garden, because the flowers of perfection and the virtues are planted in it, flourish, and grow.

5. Observe, too, that the expression is “blow through my garden,” not blow in it. There is a great difference between God’s breathing into the soul and through it. To breathe into the soul is to infuse into it graces, gifts, and virtues; to breathe through it is, on the part of God, to touch and move its virtues and perfections now possessed, renewing them and stirring them in such a way that they send forth their marvelous fragrance and sweetness. Thus aromatic spices, when shaken or touched, give forth the abundant odors which are not otherwise so distinctly perceived. The soul is not always in the conscious fruition of its acquired and infused virtues, because, in this life, they are like flowers in seed, or in bud, or like aromatic spices covered over, the perfume of which is not perceived till they are exposed and shaken.

6. But God sometimes is so merciful to the bride-soul, as—the Holy Spirit breathing meanwhile through the flourishing garden—to open these buds of virtue and expose the aromatic herbs of the soul’s gifts, perfections, and riches, to manifest to it its interior treasures and to reveal to it all its beauty. It is then marvelous to behold, and sweet to feel, the abundance of the gifts now revealed in the soul, and the beauty of the flowers of virtue now flourishing in it. No language can describe the fragrance which every one of them diffuses, each according to its kind. This state of the soul is referred to in the words, “Let its odors flow.”

7. So abundant are these odors at times, that the soul seems enveloped in delight and bathed in inestimable bliss. Not only is it conscious itself of them, but they even overflow it, so that those who know how to discern these things can perceive them. The soul in this state seems to them as a delectable garden, full of the joys and riches of God. This is observable in holy souls, not only when the flowers open, but almost always; for they have a certain air of grandeur and dignity which inspires the beholders with awe and reverence, because of the supernatural effects of their close and familiar conversation with God. We have an illustration of this in the life of Moses, the sight of whose face the people could not bear, by reason of the glory that rested upon it—the effect of his speaking to God face to face.<sup>1</sup>

8. While the Holy Spirit is breathing through the garden—this is His visitation of the soul—the Bridegroom Son of God communicates Himself to it in a profound way, enamored of it. It is for this that He sends the Holy Spirit before Him—as He sent the Apostles<sup>2</sup>—to make ready the chamber of the soul His bride, comforting it with delight, setting its garden in order, opening its flowers, revealing its gifts, and adorning it with the tapestry of graces. The bride-soul longs for this with all its might, and therefore bids the north wind not to blow, and invokes the south wind to blow through the garden, because she gains much here at once.

9. The bride now gains the fruition of all her virtues in their sweetest exercise. She gains the fruition of her Beloved in them, because it is through them that He converses with her in most intimate love, and grants her favors greater than any of the past. She gains, too, that her Beloved delights more in her because of the actual exercise of virtue, which is what pleases her most, namely, that her Beloved should be pleased with her. She gains also the permanent continuance of the sweet fragrance which remains in the soul while the Bridegroom is present,

---

<sup>1</sup> Exod. 34:30

<sup>2</sup> Luke 22:8

and the bride entertains Him with the sweetness of her virtues, as it is written: "While the King was at His repose," that is, in the soul, "my spikenard sent forth its odor."<sup>1</sup> The spikenard is the soul, which from the flowers of its virtues sends forth sweet odors to the Beloved, Who dwells within it in the union of love.

10. It is therefore very much to be desired that every soul should pray the Holy Spirit to blow through its garden, that the divine odors of God may flow. And as this is so necessary, so blissful and profitable to the soul, the bride desires it, and prays for it, in the words of the Cantic, saying, "Arise, north wind, and come, south wind; blow through my garden, and let the aromatic spices thereof flow."<sup>2</sup> The soul prays for this, not because of the delight and bliss consequent upon it, but because of the delight it ministers to the Beloved, and because it prepares the way and announces the presence of the Son of God, Who comes to rejoice in it. Hence the soul adds:

*"And my Beloved shall feed among the flowers."*

11. The delight which the Son of God finds now in the soul is described as pasture. This word expresses most forcibly the truth, because pasture not only gladdens, but also sustains. Thus the Son of God delights in the soul, in the delights thereof, and is sustained in them—that is, He abides within it as in a place which pleases Him exceedingly, because the place itself really delights in Him. This, I believe, is the meaning of those words recorded in the proverbs of Solomon: "My delights were to be with the children of men;"<sup>3</sup> that is, when they delight to be with Me, Who am the Son of God.

12. Observe, here, that it is not said that the Beloved shall feed on the flowers, but that He shall feed among the flowers. For, as the communications of the Beloved are in the soul itself, through the adornment of the virtues, it follows that what He feeds on is the soul which He transformed into Himself, now that it is prepared and adorned with these flowers of virtues, graces, and perfections, which are the things whereby, and among which, He feeds. These, by the power of the Holy Spirit, are sending forth in the soul the odors of sweetness to the Son of God, that He may feed there the more in the love thereof; for this is the love of the Bridegroom, to be united to the soul amid the fragrance of the flowers.

13. The bride in the Cantic has observed this, for she had experience of it, saying: "My Beloved is gone down into His garden, to the bed of aromatic spices, to feed in the gardens, and to gather lilies. I to my Beloved, and my Beloved to me, Who feeds among the lilies."<sup>4</sup> That is, "Who feeds and delights in my soul, which is His garden, among the lilies of my virtues, perfections, and graces."

#### NOTE

IN the state of spiritual espousals the soul contemplating its great riches and excellence, but unable to enter into the possession and fruition of them as it desires, because it is still in the flesh, often suffers exceedingly, and then more

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 1:11

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 4:16

<sup>3</sup> Prov. 8:31

<sup>4</sup> Cant. 6:1,2



particularly when its knowledge of them becomes more profound. It then sees itself in the body, like a prince in prison, subject to all misery, whose authority is disregarded, whose territories and wealth are confiscated, and who of his former substance receives but a miserable dole. How greatly he suffers anyone may see, especially when his household is no longer obedient, and his slaves and servants, forgetting all respect, plunder him of the scanty provisions of his table. Thus is it with the soul in the body, for when God mercifully admits it to a foretaste of the good things which He has prepared for it, the wicked servants of desire in the sensual part, now a slave of disorderly motions, now other rebellious movements, rise up against it in order to rob it of its good.

2. The soul feels itself as if it were in the land of enemies, tyrannized over by the stranger, like the dead among the dead. Its feelings are those which the prophet Baruch gave vent to when he described the misery of Jacob's captivity: "How happens it, O Israel, that you are in your enemies' land? You have grown old in a strange country, you are defiled with the dead: you are counted with them that go down into hell."<sup>1</sup> This misery of the soul, in the captivity of the body, is thus spoken of by Jeremiah, saying: "Is Israel a bondman or a home-born slave? Why then is he become a prey? The lions have roared upon him, and have made a noise."<sup>2</sup> The lions are the desires and the rebellious motions of the tyrant king of sensuality. In order to express the trouble which this tyrant occasions, and the desire of the soul to see this kingdom of sensuality with all its hosts destroyed, or wholly subject to the spirit, the soul lifting up its eyes to the Bridegroom, as to one who can effect it, speaks against those rebellious motions in the words of the next stanza.

---

<sup>1</sup> Bar. 3:10,11

<sup>2</sup> Jer. 2:14,15

## STANZA XVIII

*O nymphs of Judea!  
While amid the flowers and the rose-trees  
The amber sends forth its perfume,  
Tarry in the suburbs,  
And touch not our thresholds.*

IT is the bride that speaks; for seeing herself, as to the higher part of the soul, adorned with the rich endowments of her Beloved, and seeing Him delighting in her, she desires to preserve herself in security, and in the continued fruition of them. Seeing also that hindrances will arise, as in fact they do, from the sensual part of the soul, which will disturb so great a good, she bids the operations and motions of the soul's lower nature to cease, in the senses and faculties of it, and sensuality not to overstep its boundaries to trouble and disquiet the higher and spiritual portion of the soul: not to hinder even for a moment the sweetness she enjoys. The motions of the lower part, and their powers, if they show themselves during the enjoyment of the spirit, are so much more troublesome and disturbing, the more active they are.

*"O nymphs of Judea."*

2. The lower, that is the sensual part of the soul, is called Judea. It is called Judea because it is weak, and carnal, and blind, like the Jewish people. All the imaginations, fancies, motions, and inclinations of the lower part of the soul are called nymphs, for as nymphs with their beauty and attractions entice men to love them, so the operations and motions of sensuality softly and earnestly strive to entice the will from the rational part, in order to withdraw it from that which is interior, and to fix it on that which is exterior, to which they are prone themselves. They also strive to influence the understanding to join with them in their low views, and to bring down reason to the level of sense by the attractions of the latter. The soul, therefore, says in effect: "O sensual operations and motions."

*"While amid the flowers and the rose-trees."*

3. The flowers, as I have said, are the virtues of the soul, and the rose-trees are its powers, memory, understanding, and will, which produce and nurture the flowers of divine conceptions, acts of love and the virtues, while the amber sends forth its perfume in the virtues and powers of the soul.

*"The amber sends forth its perfume."*

4. The amber is the divine spirit of the Bridegroom Who dwells in the soul. To send forth the perfume among the flowers and the rose-trees, is to diffuse and communicate Himself most sweetly in the powers and virtues of the soul, thereby filling it with the perfume of divine sweetness. Meanwhile, then, when the Divine Spirit is filling my soul with spiritual sweetness,

*"Tarry in the suburbs."*

5. In the suburbs of Judea, which is the inferior or sensual part of the soul. The suburbs are the interior senses, namely, memory, fancy, and imagination, where forms and images of things collect, by the help of which sensuality stirs up concupiscence and desires. These forms are the nymphs, and while they are quiet and tranquil the desires are also asleep. They enter into the suburbs of the interior senses by the gates of the outward senses, of sight, hearing, smell, etc. We can thus give the name of suburbs to all the powers and interior or exterior senses of the sensual part of the soul, because they are outside the walls of the city.

6. That part of the soul which may be called the city is that which is most interior, the rational part, which is capable of conversation with God, the operations of which are contrary to those of sensuality. But there is a natural intercourse between those who dwell in the suburbs of the sensual part—that is, the nymphs—and those who dwell in the higher part, which is the city itself; and, therefore, what takes place in the lower part is ordinarily felt in the higher, and consequently compels attention to itself and disturbs the spiritual operation which is conversant with God. Hence the soul bids the nymphs tarry in the suburbs—that is, to remain at rest in the exterior and interior senses of the sensual part,

*“And touch not our thresholds.”*

7. Let not even your first movements touch the higher part, for the first movements of the soul are the entrance and thresholds of it. When the first movements have passed into the reason, they have crossed the threshold, but when they remain as first movements only they are then said merely to touch the threshold, or to cry at the gate, which is the case when reason and sense contend over an unreasonable act. The soul here not only bids these not to touch it, but also charges all considerations whatever which do not minister to its repose and the good it enjoys to keep far away.

#### NOTE

THE soul in this state is become so great an enemy of the lower part, and its operations, that it would have God communicate nothing to it when He communicates with the higher. If He will communicate with the lower, it must be in a slight degree, or the soul, because of its natural weakness, will be unable to endure it without fainting, and consequently the spirit cannot rejoice in peace, because it is then troubled. “For,” as the wise man says, “the body that is corrupted burdens the soul.”<sup>1</sup> And as the soul longs for the highest and noblest conversation with God, which is impossible in the company of the sensual part, it begs of God to deal with it without the intervention of the senses. That sublime vision of St. Paul in the third heaven, wherein, he says, he saw God, but yet knew not whether he was in the body or out of the body, must have been, be it what it may, independent of the body: for if the body had any share in it, he must have known it, and the vision could not have been what it was, seeing that he “heard secret words which it is not lawful for a man to speak.”<sup>2</sup> The soul, therefore, knowing well that graces so great cannot be received in a vessel so mean, and longing to receive them out of the body,—or at least without it, addresses the

<sup>1</sup> Wisd. 9:15

<sup>2</sup> 2 Cor. 12:2-4

**Bridegroom in the words that follow:**

## STANZA XIX

*Hide yourself, O my Beloved!  
Turn Your face to the mountains,  
Do not speak,  
But regard the companions  
Of her who is traveling amidst strange islands.*

HERE the bride presents four petitions to the Bridegroom. She prays that He would be pleased to converse with her most interiorly in the secret chamber of the soul. The second, that He would invest and inform her faculties with the glory and excellence of His Divinity. The third, that He would converse with her so profoundly as to surpass all knowledge and expression, and in such a way that the exterior and sensual part may not perceive it. The fourth, that He would love the many virtues and graces which He has implanted in her, adorned with which she is ascending upwards to God in the highest knowledge of the Divinity, and in transports of love most strange and singular, surpassing those of ordinary experience.

*“Hide Yourself, O my Beloved!”*

2. “O my Bridegroom, most beloved, hide Yourself in the inmost depths of my soul, communicating Yourself to it in secret, and manifesting Your hidden wonders which no mortal eyes may see.

*“Turn Your face to the mountains.”*

3. The face of God is His divinity. The mountains are the powers of the soul, memory, understanding, and will. Thus the meaning of these words is: Enlighten my understanding with Your Divinity, and give it the divine intelligence, fill my will with divine love, and my memory with divine possession of glory. The bride here prays for all that may be prayed for; for she is not content with that knowledge of God once granted to Moses<sup>1</sup>—the knowledge of Him by His works—for she prays to see the face of God, which is the essential communication of His Divinity to the soul, without any intervening medium, by a certain knowledge thereof in the Divinity. This is something beyond sense, and divested of accidents, inasmuch as it is the contact of pure substances—that is, of the soul and the Divinity.

*“Do not speak.”*

4. That is, do not speak as before, when Your conversation with me was known to the outward senses, for it was once such as to be comprehended by them; it was not so profound but they could fathom it. Now let Your conversation with me be so deep and so substantial, and so interior, as to be above the reach of the senses; for the substance of the spirit is incommunicable to sense, and the communication made through the senses, especially in this life, cannot be purely spiritual,

---

<sup>1</sup> Exod. 33:23

because the senses are not capable of it. The soul, therefore, longing for that substantial and essential communication of God, of which sense cannot be cognizant, prays the Bridegroom not to speak: that is to say, let the deep secret of the spiritual union be such as to escape the notice of the senses, like the secret which St. Paul heard, and which it is not lawful for a man to speak.<sup>1</sup>

*“But regard the companions.”*

5. The regard of God is love and grace. The companions here are the many virtues of the soul, its gifts, perfections, and other spiritual graces with which God has endowed it; pledges, tokens, and presents of its betrothal. Thus the meaning of the words seems to be this: “Turn Your face to the interior of my soul, O my Beloved; be enamored of the treasures which You have laid up there, so that, enamored of them, You may hide Yourself among them and there dwell; for in truth, though they are Yours, they are mine also, because You have given them.”

*“Of her who travels amidst strange islands.”*

6. That is, “Of my soul tending towards You through strange knowledge of You, by strange ways”—strange to sense and to the ordinary perceptions of nature. It is as if the bride said, by way of constraining Him to yield: “Seeing that my soul is tending towards You through knowledge which is spiritual, strange, unknown to sense, also communicate Yourself to it so interiorly and so profoundly that the senses may not observe it.”

#### NOTE

IN order to the attainment of a state of perfection so high as this of the spiritual marriage, the soul that aims at it must not only be purified and cleansed from all the imperfections, rebellions, and imperfect habits of the inferior part, which is now—the old man being put away—subject and obedient to the higher, but it must also have great courage and most exalted love for so strong and close an embrace of God. For in this state the soul not only attains to exceeding pureness and beauty, but also acquires a terrible strength by reason of that strict and close bond which in this union binds it to God. The soul, therefore, in order to reach this state must have purity, strength, and adequate love. The Holy Spirit, the author of this spiritual union, desirous that the soul should attain thus far in order to merit it, addresses Himself to the Father and the Son, saying: “Our sister is little, and has no breasts. What shall we do to our sister in the day when she is to be spoken to? If she is a wall, let us build upon it bulwarks of silver; if she is a door, let us join it together with boards of cedar.”<sup>2</sup>

2. The “bulwarks of silver” are the strong heroic virtues comprised in the faith, which is signified by silver, and these heroic virtues are those of the spiritual marriage, which are built upon the soul, signified by the wall, relying on the strength of which, the peaceful Bridegroom reposes undisturbed by any infirmities. The “boards of cedar” are the affections and accessories of this deep love which is signified by the cedar-tree, and this is the love of the spiritual marriage. In order “to join it together,” that is, to adorn the bride, it is necessary

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. 12:4

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 8:8

she should be the door for the Bridegroom to enter through, keeping the door of the will open in a perfect and true consent of love, which is the consent of the betrothal given previous to the spiritual marriage. The breasts of the bride are also this perfect love which she must have in order to appear in the presence of Christ her Bridegroom for the perfection of such a state.

3. It is written in the Canticle that the bride in her longing for this presence immediately replied, saying: "I am a wall: and my breasts are as a tower"—that is, "My soul is strong, and my love most deep"—that He may not fail her on that ground. The bride, too, had expressed as much in the preceding stanzas, out of the fullness of her longing for the perfect union and transformation, and particularly in the last, wherein she set before the Bridegroom all the virtues, graces, and good dispositions with which she was adorned by Him, and that with the object of making Him the prisoner of her love.

4. Now the Bridegroom, to bring this matter to a close, replies in the two stanzas that follow, which describe Him as perfectly purifying the soul, strengthening and disposing it, both as to its sensual and spiritual part, for this state, and charging all resistance and rebellion, both of the flesh and of the devil, to cease, saying:

## STANZAS XX, XXI

### THE BRIDEGROOM

*Light-winged birds,  
Lions, fawns, bounding does,  
Mountains, valleys, strands,  
Waters, winds, heat,  
And the terrors that keep watch by night;*

*By the soft lyres  
And the siren strains, I adjure you,  
Let your fury cease,  
And touch not the wall,  
That the bride may sleep in greater security.*

HERE the Son of God, the Bridegroom, leads the bride into the enjoyment of peace and tranquillity in the conformity of her lower to her higher nature, purging away all her imperfections, subjecting the natural powers of the soul to reason, and mortifying all her desires, as it is expressed in these two stanzas, the meaning of which is as follows. In the first place the Bridegroom adjures and commands all vain distractions of the fancy and imagination from henceforth to cease, and controls the irascible and concupiscible faculties which were previously the sources of so much affliction. He brings, so far as it is possible in this life, the three powers of memory, understanding, and will to the perfection of their objects, and then adjures and commands the four passions of the soul, joy, hope, grief, and fear, to be still, and bids them from henceforth be moderate and calm.

2. All these passions and faculties are comprehended under the expressions employed in the first stanza, the operations of which, full of trouble, the Bridegroom subdues by that great sweetness, joy, and courage which the bride enjoys in the spiritual surrender of Himself to her which God makes at this time; under the influence of which, because God transforms the soul effectually in Himself, all the faculties, desires, and movements of the soul lose their natural imperfection and become divine.

*“Light-winged birds.”*

3. These are the distractions of the imagination, light and rapid in their flight from one subject to another. When the will is tranquilly enjoying the sweet conversation of the Beloved, these distractions produce weariness, and in their swift flight quench its joy. The Bridegroom adjures them by the soft lyres. That is, now that the sweetness of the soul is so abundant and so continuous that they cannot interfere with it, as they did before when it had not reached this state, He adjures them, and bids them cease from their disquieting violence. The same explanation is to be given of the rest of the stanza.

*“Lions, fawns, bounding does.”*



4. By the lions is meant the raging violence of the irascible faculty, which in its acts is bold and daring as a lion. The “fawns and bounding does” are the concupiscible faculty—that is, the power of desire, the qualities of which are two, timidity and rashness. Timidity betrays itself when things do not turn out according to our wishes, for then the mind retires within itself discouraged, and in this respect the soul resembles the fawns. For as fawns have the concupiscible faculty stronger than many other animals, so are they more retiring and more timid. Rashness betrays itself when we have our own way, for the mind is then neither retiring nor timid, but desires boldly, and gratifies all its inclinations. This quality of rashness is compared to the does, who so eagerly seek what they desire that they not only run, but even leap after it; hence they are described as bounding does.

5. Thus the Bridegroom, in adjuring the lions, restrains the violence and controls the fury of rage; in adjuring the fawns, He strengthens the concupiscible faculty against timidity and irresolution; and in adjuring the does He satisfies and subdues the desires which were restless before, leaping, like deer, from one object to another, to satisfy that concupiscence which is now satisfied by the soft lyres, the sweetness of which it enjoys, and by the siren strains, in the delight of which it revels.

6. But the Bridegroom does not adjure anger and concupiscence themselves, because these passions never cease from the soul—but their vexations and disorderly acts, signified by the “lions, fawns, and bounding does,” for it is necessary that these disorderly acts should cease in this state.

*“Mountains, valleys, strands.”*

7. These are the vicious and disorderly actions of the three faculties of the soul—memory, understanding, and will. These actions are disorderly and vicious when they are in extremes, or, if not in extreme, tending to one extreme or other. Thus the mountains signify those actions which are vicious in excess, mountains being high; the valleys, being low, signify those which are vicious in the extreme of defect. Strands, which are neither high nor low, but, inasmuch as they are not perfectly level, tend to one extreme or other, signify those acts of the three powers of the soul which depart slightly in either direction from the true mean and equality of justice. These actions, though not disorderly in the extreme, as they would be if they amounted to mortal sin, are nevertheless disorderly in part, tending towards venial sin or imperfection, however slight that tendency may be, in the understanding, memory, and will. He adjures also all these actions which depart from the true mean, and bids them cease before the soft lyres and the siren strains, which so effectually charm the powers of the soul as to occupy them completely in their true and proper functions, so that they avoid not only all extremes, but also the slightest tendency to them.

*“Waters, winds, heat, and the terrors  
that keep watch by night.”*

8. These are the affections of the four passions, grief, hope, joy, and fear. The waters are the affections of grief which afflict the soul, for they rush into it like water. “Save me, O God,” says the Psalmist, “for the waters have come in even to

my soul.”<sup>1</sup> The winds are the affections of hope, for they rush forth like wind, desiring what which is not present but hoped for, as the Psalmist says: “I opened my mouth and drew breath: because I longed for Your commandments.”<sup>2</sup> That is, “I opened the mouth of my hope, and drew in the wind of desire, because I hoped and longed for Your commandments.” Heat is the affections of joy which, like fire, inflame the heart, as it is written: “My heart waxed hot within me; and in my meditation a fire shall burn”;<sup>3</sup> that is, “while I meditate I shall have joy.”

9. The “terrors that keep watch by night” are the affections of fear, which in spiritual persons who have not attained to the state of spiritual marriage are usually exceedingly strong. They come sometimes from God when He is going to bestow certain great graces upon souls, as I said before;<sup>4</sup> He is wont then to fill the mind with dread, to make the flesh tremble and the senses numb, because nature is not made strong and perfect and prepared for these graces. They come also at times from the evil spirit, who, out of envy and malignity, when he sees a soul sweetly recollected in God, labors to disturb its tranquillity by exciting horror and dread, in order to destroy so great a blessing, and sometimes utters his threats, as it were in the interior of the soul. But when he finds that he cannot penetrate within the soul, because it is so recollected, and so united with God, he strives at least in the province of sense to produce exterior distractions and inconstancy, sensible pains and horrors, if perchance he may in this way disturb the soul in the bridal chamber.

10. These are called terrors of the night, because they are the work of evil spirits, and because Satan labors, by the help thereof, to involve the soul in darkness, and to obscure the divine light wherein it rejoices. These terrors are called watchers, because they awaken the soul and rouse it from its sweet interior slumber, and also because Satan, their author, is ever on the watch to produce them. These terrors strike the soul of persons who are already spiritual, passively, and come either from God or the evil spirit. I do not refer to temporal or natural terrors, because spiritual men are not subject to these, as they are to those of which I am speaking.

11. The Beloved adjures the affections of these four passions, compels them to cease and to be at rest, because He supplies the bride now with force, and courage, and satisfaction, by the soft lyres of His sweetness and the siren strains of His delight, so that not only they shall not domineer over the soul, but shall not occasion it any distaste whatever. Such is the grandeur and stability of the soul in this state, that, although formerly the waters of grief overwhelmed it, because of its own or other men’s sins—which is what spiritual persons most feel—the consideration of them now excites neither pain nor annoyance; even the sensible feeling of compassion no longer exists, though the effects of it continue in perfection. The weaknesses of its virtues are no longer in the soul, for they are now constant, strong, and perfect. As the angels perfectly appreciate all sorrowful things without the sense of pain, and perform acts of mercy without the sentiment of pity, so the soul in this transformation of love. God, however, dispenses sometimes, on certain occasions, with the soul in this matter, allowing it to feel

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 68:2

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 118:131

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 38:4

<sup>4</sup> Stanza xiii sect. 4; xiv sect. 26.

and suffer, that it may become more fervent in love, and grow in merit, or for some other reasons, as He dispensed with His Virgin Mother, St. Paul, and others. This, however, is not the ordinary condition of this state.

12. Neither do the desires of hope afflict the soul now, because, satisfied in its union with God, so far as it is possible in this life, it has nothing of this world to hope for, and nothing spiritual to desire, seeing that it feels itself to be full of the riches of God, though it may grow in charity, and thus, whether living or dying, it is conformed to the will of God, saying with the sense and spirit, "Your will be done," free from the violence of inclination and desires; and accordingly even its longing for the beatific vision is without pain.

13. The affections of joy, also, which were wont to move the soul with more or less vehemence, are not sensibly diminished; neither does their abundance occasion any surprise. The joy of the soul is now so abundant that it is like the sea, which is not diminished by the rivers that flow out of it, nor increased by those that empty themselves into it; for the soul is now that fountain of which our Lord said that it is "springing up into life everlasting."<sup>1</sup>

14. I have said that the soul receives nothing new or unusual in this state of transformation; it seems to lose all accidental joy, which is not withheld even from the glorified. That is, accidental joys and sweetness are indeed no strangers to this soul; indeed, those which it ordinarily has cannot be numbered; yet, for all this, as to the substantial communication of the spirit, there is no increase of joy, for that which may occur anew the soul possesses already, and thus what the soul has already within itself is greater than anything that comes anew. Hence, then, whenever any subject of joy and gladness, whether exterior or spiritually interior, presents itself to the soul, the soul immediately starts rejoicing in the riches it possesses already within itself, and the joy it has in them is far greater than any which these new accessions minister, because, in a certain sense, God is become its possession, Who, though He delights in all things, yet in nothing so much as in Himself, seeing that He has all good eminently in Himself. Thus all accessions of joy serve to remind the soul that its real joy is in its interior possessions, rather than in these accidental causes, because, as I have said, the former are greater than the latter.

15. It is very natural for the soul, even when a particular matter gives it pleasure, that, possessing another of greater worth and gladness, it should remember it at once and take its pleasure in it. The accidental character of these spiritual accessions, and the new impressions they make on the soul, may be said to be as nothing in comparison with that substantial source which it has within itself: for the soul which has attained to the perfect transformation, and is full-grown, grows no more in this state by means of these spiritual accessions, as those souls do who have not yet advanced so far. It is a marvelous thing that the soul, while it receives no accessions of delight, should still seem to do so and also to have been in possession of them. The reason is that it is always tasting them anew, because they are ever renewed; and thus it seems to be continually the recipient of new accessions, while it has no need of them whatever.

16. But if we speak of that light of glory which in this, the soul's embrace, God

---

<sup>1</sup> John 4:14

sometimes produces within it, and which is a certain spiritual communion wherein He causes it to behold and enjoy at the same time the abyss of delight and riches which He has laid up within it, there is no language to express any degree of it. As the sun when it shines upon the sea illumines its great depths, and reveals the pearls, and gold, and precious stones therein, so the divine sun of the Bridegroom, turning towards the bride, reveals in a way the riches of her soul, so that even the angels behold her with amazement and say: "Who is she that comes forth as the morning rising, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, terrible as the army of a camp set in array."<sup>1</sup> This illumination adds nothing to the grandeur of the soul, notwithstanding its greatness, because it merely reveals that which the soul already possessed in order that it might rejoice in it.

17. Finally, the terrors that keep watch by night do not come close to her, because of her pureness, courage, and confident trust in God; the evil spirits cannot shroud her in darkness, nor alarm her with terrors, nor disturb her with their violent assaults. Thus nothing can approach her, nothing can molest her, for she has escaped from all created things and entered into God, to the fruition of perfect peace, sweetness, and delight, so far as that is possible in this life. It is to this state that the words of Solomon are applicable: "A secure mind is as it were a continual feast."<sup>2</sup> As in a feast we have the savor of all meat, and the sweetness of all music, so in this feast, which the bride keeps in the bosom of her Beloved, the soul rejoices in all delight, and has the taste of all sweetness. All that I have said, and all that may be said, on this subject, will always fall short of that which passes in the soul which has attained to this blessed state. For when it shall have attained to the peace of God, "which," in the words of the Apostle, "surpasses all understanding,"<sup>3</sup> no description of its state is possible.

*"By the soft lyres and the siren strains I adjure you."*

18. The soft lyres are the sweetness which the Bridegroom communicates to the soul in this state, and by which He makes all its troubles to cease. As the music of lyres fills the soul with sweetness and delight, carries it rapturously out of itself, so that it forgets all its weariness and grief, so in like manner this sweetness so absorbs the soul that nothing painful can reach it. The Bridegroom says, in substance: "By that sweetness which I give you, let all your bitterness cease." The siren strains are the ordinary joys of the soul. These are called siren strains because, as it is said, the music of the sirens is so sweet and delicious that he who hears it is so rapt and so carried out of himself that he forgets everything. In the same way the soul is so absorbed in, and refreshed by, the delight of this union that it becomes, as it were, charmed against all the vexations and troubles that may assail it; it is to these the next words of the stanza refer:

*"Let your fury cease."*

19. This is the troubles and anxieties which flow from unruly acts and affections. As anger is a certain violence which disturbs peace, overlapping its bounds, so also all these affections in their motions transgress the bounds of the peace and tranquillity of the soul, disturbing it whenever they touch it. Hence the

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 6:9

<sup>2</sup> Prov. 15:15

<sup>3</sup> Phil. 4:7

Bridegroom says:

*“And touch not the wall.”*

20. The wall is the territory of peace and the fortress of virtue and perfections, which are the defenses and protection of the soul. The soul is the garden wherein the Beloved feeds among the flowers, defended and guarded for Him alone. Hence it is called in the Canticle “a garden enclosed.”<sup>1</sup> The Bridegroom bids all disorderly emotions not to touch the territory and wall of His garden.

21. “That the bride may sleep in greater security.” That is, that she is delighting herself with more sweetness in the tranquillity and sweetness she has in the Beloved. That is to say, that now no door is shut against the soul, and that it is in its power to abandon itself whenever it wills to this sweet sleep of love, according to the words of the Bridegroom in the Canticle, “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the harts of the fields, that you raise not up nor make the beloved to awake till herself will.”<sup>2</sup>

#### NOTE

THE Bridegroom was so anxious to rescue His bride from the power of the flesh and the devil and to set her free, that, having done so, He rejoices over her like the good shepherd who, having found the sheep that was lost, laid it upon his shoulders rejoicing; like the woman who, having found the money she had lost, after lighting a candle and sweeping the house, called “together her friends and neighbors, saying, Rejoice with me.”<sup>3</sup> So this loving Shepherd and Bridegroom of souls shows a marvelous joy and delight when He beholds a soul gained to perfection lying on His shoulders, and by His hands held fast in the longed-for embrace and union. He is not alone in His joy, for He makes the angels and the souls of the blessed partakers of His glory, saying, as in the Canticle, “Go forth, you daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon in the diadem with which his mother crowned him in the day of his betrothal, and in the day of the joy of his heart.”<sup>4</sup> He calls the soul His crown, His bride, and the joy of His heart: He carries it in His arms, and as a bridegroom leads it into His bridal chamber, as we shall see in the following stanza:

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 4:12

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 3:5

<sup>3</sup> Luke 15:5,8,9

<sup>4</sup> Cant. 3:11

## STANZA XXII

*The bride has entered  
The pleasant and desirable garden,  
And there reposes to her heart's content;  
Her neck reclining  
On the sweet arms of the Beloved.*

THE bride having done what she could in order that the foxes may be caught, the north wind cease, the nymphs, hindrances to the desired joy of the state of spiritual marriage, forgo their troublesome importunities, and having also invoked and obtained the favorable wind of the Holy Spirit, which is the right disposition and means for the perfection of this state, it remains for me now to speak of it in the stanza in which the Bridegroom calls the soul His bride, and speaks of two things: 1. He says that the soul, having gone forth victoriously, has entered the delectable state of spiritual marriage, which they had both so earnestly desired. 2. He enumerates the properties of that state, into the fruition of which the soul has entered, namely, perfect repose, and the resting of the neck on the arms of the Beloved.

*"The bride has entered."*

2. For the better understanding of the arrangement of these stanzas, and of the way by which the soul advances till it reaches the state of spiritual marriage, which is the very highest, and of which, by the grace of God, I am now about to treat, we must keep in mind that the soul, before it enters it, must be tried in tribulations, in sharp mortifications, and in meditation on spiritual things. This is the subject of this canticle till we come to the fifth stanza, beginning with the words, "A thousand graces diffusing." Then the soul enters on the contemplative life, passing through those ways and straits of love which are described in the course of the canticle, till we come to the thirteenth, beginning with "Turn them away, O my Beloved!" This is the moment of the spiritual betrothal; and then the soul advances by the unitive way, the recipient of many and very great communications, jewels and gifts from the Bridegroom as to one betrothed, and grows into perfect love, as appears from the stanzas which follow that beginning with "Turn them away, O my Beloved!" (the moment of betrothal), to the present, beginning with the words:

*"The bride has entered."*

3. The spiritual marriage of the soul and the Son of God now remains to be accomplished. This is, beyond all comparison, a far higher state than that of betrothal, because it is a complete transformation into the Beloved; whereby they surrender each to the other the entire possession of themselves in the perfect union of love, wherein the soul becomes divine, and, by participation, God, so far as it is in this life. I believe that no soul ever attains to this state without being confirmed in grace, for the faithfulness of both is confirmed; that of God being confirmed in the soul. Hence it follows, that this is the very highest state possible

in this life. As by natural marriage there are “two in one flesh,”<sup>1</sup> so also in the spiritual marriage between God and the soul there are two natures in one spirit and love, as we learn from St. Paul, who made use of the same metaphor, saying, “He that cleaves to the Lord is one spirit.”<sup>2</sup> So, when the light of a star, or of a candle, is united to that of the sun, the light is not that of the star, nor of the candle, but of the sun itself, which absorbs all other light in its own.

4. It is of this state that the Bridegroom is now speaking, saying, “The bride has entered”; that is, out of all temporal and natural things, out of all spiritual affections, ways, and methods, having left on one side, and forgotten, all temptations, trials, sorrows, anxieties and cares, transformed in this embrace.

*“The pleasant and desirable garden.”*

5. That is, the soul is transformed in God, Who is here called the pleasant garden because of the delicious and sweet repose which the soul finds in Him. But the soul does not enter the garden of perfect transformation, the glory and the joy of the spiritual marriage, without passing first through the spiritual betrothal, the mutual faithful love of the betrothed. When the soul has lived for some time as the bride of the Son, in perfect and sweet love, God calls it and leads it into His flourishing garden for the celebration of the spiritual marriage. Then the two natures are so united, what is divine is so communicated to what is human, that, without undergoing any essential change, each seems to be God—yet not perfectly so in this life, though still in a manner which can neither be described nor conceived.

6. We learn this truth very clearly from the Bridegroom Himself in the Canticle, where He invites the soul, now His bride, to enter this state, saying: “I am come into my garden, O My sister, My bride: I have gathered My myrrh with My aromatic spices.”<sup>3</sup> He calls the soul His sister, His bride, for it is such in love by that surrender which it has made of itself before He had called it to the state of spiritual marriage, when, as He says, He gathered His myrrh with His aromatic spices; that is, the fruits of flowers now ripe and made ready for the soul, which are the delights and grandeurs communicated to it by Himself in this state, that is Himself, and for which He is the pleasant and desirable garden.

7. The whole aim and desire of the soul and of God, in all this, is the accomplishment and perfection of this state, and the soul is therefore never weary till it reaches it; because it finds there a much greater abundance and fullness in God, a more secure and lasting peace, and a sweetness incomparably more perfect than in the spiritual betrothal, seeing that it reposes between the arms of such a Bridegroom, Whose spiritual embraces are so real that it, through them, lives the life of God. Now is fulfilled what St. Paul referred to when he said: “I live; now not I, but Christ lives in me.”<sup>4</sup> And now that the soul lives a life so happy and so glorious as this life of God, consider what a sweet life it must be—a life where God sees nothing displeasing, and where the soul finds nothing irksome, but rather the glory and delight of God in the very substance of itself, now

---

<sup>1</sup> Gen. 2:24

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor 6:17

<sup>3</sup> Cant. 5:1

<sup>4</sup> Gal. 2:20

transformed in Him.

*“And there reposes to her heart’s content;  
her neck reclining on the sweet arms of the Beloved.”*

8. The neck is the soul’s strength, by means of which its union with the Beloved is wrought; for the soul could not endure so close an embrace if it had not been very strong. And as the soul has labored in this strength, practiced virtue, overcome vice, it is fitting that it should rest there from its labors, “her neck reclining on the sweet arms of the Beloved.”

9. This reclining of the neck on the arms of God is the union of the soul’s strength, or, rather, of the soul’s weakness, with the strength of God, in Whom our weakness, resting and transformed, puts on the strength of God Himself. The state of spiritual matrimony is therefore most fitly designated by the reclining of the neck on the sweet arms of the Beloved; seeing that God is the strength and sweetness of the soul, Who guards and defends it from all evil and gives it to taste of all good.

10. Hence the bride in the Canticle, longing for this state, says to the Bridegroom: “Who shall give to me You my brother, sucking the breast of my mother, that I may find You without, and kiss You, and now no man may despise me.”<sup>1</sup> By addressing Him as her Brother she shows the equality between them in the betrothal of love, before she entered the state of spiritual marriage. “Sucking the breast of my mother” signifies the drying up of the passions and desires, which are the breasts and milk of our mother Eve in our flesh, which are a bar to this state. The “finding Him without” is to find Him in detachment from all things and from self when the bride is in solitude, spiritually detached, which takes place when all the desires are quenched. “And kiss You”—that is, be united with the Bridegroom, alone with Him alone.

11. This is the union of the nature of the soul, in solitude, cleansed from all impurity, natural, temporal, and spiritual, with the Bridegroom alone, with His nature, by love only—that of love which is the only love of the spiritual marriage, wherein the soul, as it were, kisses God when none despises it nor makes it afraid. For in this state the soul is no longer molested, either by the devil, or the flesh, or the world, or the desires, seeing that here is fulfilled what is written in the Canticle: “Winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land.”<sup>2</sup>

#### NOTE

WHEN the soul has been raised to the high state of spiritual marriage, the Bridegroom reveals to it, as His faithful consort, His own marvelous secrets most readily and most frequently, for he who truly and sincerely loves hides nothing from the object of his affections. The chief matter of His communications are the sweet mysteries of His incarnation, the ways and means of redemption, which is one of the highest works of God, and so is to the soul one of the sweetest. Though He communicates many other mysteries, He speaks in the following stanza of His

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 8:1

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 2:11,12



incarnation only, as being the chief; and thus addresses the soul in the words that follow:

## STANZA XXIII

*Beneath the apple-tree  
There were you betrothed;  
There I gave you My hand,  
And you were redeemed  
Where your mother was corrupted.*

THE Bridegroom tells the soul of the wondrous way of its redemption and betrothal to Himself, by referring to the way in which the human race was lost. As it was by the forbidden tree of paradise that our nature was corrupted in Adam and lost, so it was by the tree of the Cross that it was redeemed and restored. The Bridegroom there stretched forth the hand of His grace and mercy, in His death and passion, “making void the law of commandments”<sup>1</sup> which original sin had placed between us and God.

*“Beneath the apple-tree,”*

2. That is the wood of the Cross, where the Son of God was conqueror, and where He betrothed our human nature to Himself, and, by consequence, every soul of man. There, on the Cross, He gave us grace and pledges of His love.

*“There were you betrothed,  
there I gave you My hand.”*

3. “Help and grace, lifting you up out of your base and miserable condition to be My companion and My bride.”

*“And you were redeemed  
where your mother was corrupted.”*

4. “Your mother, human nature, was corrupted in her first parents beneath the forbidden tree, and you were redeemed beneath the tree of the Cross. If your mother at that tree sentenced you to die, I from the Cross have given you life.” It is thus that God reveals the order and dispositions of His wisdom: eliciting good from evil, and turning that which has its origin in evil to be an instrument of greater good. This stanza is nearly word for word what the Bridegroom in the Canticle says to the bride: “Under the apple-tree I raised you up: there your mother was corrupted; there she was deflowered that bare you.”<sup>2</sup>

5. It is not the betrothal of the Cross that I am speaking of now—that takes place, once for all, when God gives the first grace to the soul in baptism. I am speaking of the betrothal in the way of perfection, which is a progressive work. And though both are but one, yet there is a difference between them. The latter is effected in the way of the soul, and therefore slowly: the former in the way of God, and therefore at once.

---

<sup>1</sup> Eph. 2:15

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 8:5

6. The betrothal of which I am speaking is that of which God speaks Himself by the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel, saying: "You were cast out upon the face of the earth in the abjection of your soul, in the day that you were born. And passing by you, I saw that you were trodden under foot in your blood; and I said to you when you were in your blood: Live: I said to you, I say; in your blood live. Multiplied as the spring of the field have I made you; and you were multiplied and made great, and you went in, and came to the ornaments of woman; your breasts swelled and your hair budded: and you were naked and full of confusion. And I passed by you and saw you, and behold, your time, the time of lovers; and I spread My garment over you and covered your ignominy. And I swore to you; and I entered a covenant with you, says the Lord God; and you were made Mine. And I washed you with water, and made clean your blood from off you: and I anointed you with oil. And I clothed you with diverse colors, and shod you with hyacinth, and I girded you with silk and clothed you with fine garments. And I adorned you with ornaments, and put bracelets on your hands, and a chain about your neck. And I put a jewel upon your forehead and rings in your ears, and a crown of beauty on your head. And you were adorned with gold and silver, and were clothed with silk, and embroidered work, and many colors: you ate fine flour, and honey, and oil, and were made beautiful exceedingly, and advanced to be a queen. And your name went forth among the nations because of your beauty."<sup>1</sup> These are the words of Ezekiel, and this is the state of that soul of which I am now speaking.

#### NOTE

AFTER the mutual surrender to each other of the bride and the Beloved, comes their bed. Thereon the bride enters into the joy of Christ. Thus the present stanza refers to the bed, which is pure and chaste, and divine, and in which the bride is pure, divine, and chaste. The bed is nothing else but the Bridegroom Himself, the Word, the Son of God, in Whom, through the union of love, the bride reposes. This bed is said to be of flowers, for the Bridegroom is not only that, but, as He says Himself of Himself, "I am the flower of the field and the lily of the valleys."<sup>2</sup> The soul reposes not only on the bed of flowers, but on that very flower which is the Son of God, and which contains in itself the divine odor, fragrance, grace, and beauty, as He says by the mouth of David, "With me is the beauty of the field."<sup>3</sup> The soul, therefore, in the stanza that follows, celebrates the properties and beauties of its bed, saying:

---

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. 16:5-14

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 2:1

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 49:11

## STANZA XXIV

### THE BRIDE

*Our bed is of flowers  
By dens of lions encompassed,  
Hung with purple,  
Made in peace,  
And crowned with a thousand shields of gold.*

IN two of the foregoing stanzas—the fourteenth and the fifteenth—the bride-soul celebrated the grace and magnificence of the Beloved, the Son of God. In the present stanza she not only pursues the same subject, but also sings of her high and blessed state, and her own security in it. She then proceeds to the virtues and rich gifts with which she is endowed and adorned in the chamber of the Bridegroom; for she says that she is in union with Him, and is strong in virtue. Next she says that she has attained to the perfection of love, and then that she enjoys perfect spiritual peace, endowed and adorned with gifts and graces, so far as it is possible to have them in this life. The first subject of the stanza is the joy which the bride feels in her union with the Beloved, saying:

*“Our bed is of flowers.”*

2. I have already said that this bed of the soul is the bosom and love of the Son of God, full of flowers to the soul, which now united to God and reposing in Him, as His bride, shares the bosom and love of the Beloved. That is, the soul is admitted to a knowledge of the wisdom, secrets and graces, and gifts and powers of God, whereby it is made so beautiful, so rich, so abounding in delights that it seems to be lying on a bed of many-colored divine flowers, the touch of which makes it thrill with joy, and the odors of which refresh it.

3. This union of love with God is therefore most appropriately called a bed of flowers, and is so called by the bride in the Canticle, saying to the Beloved, “Our bed is of flowers.”<sup>1</sup> She speaks of it as ours, because the virtues and the love, one and the same, of the Beloved are common to both together, and the delight of both is one and the same; as it is written: “My delights were to be with the children of men.”<sup>2</sup> The bed is said to be of flowers, because in this state the virtues in the soul are perfect and heroic, which they could not be until the bed had flowered in perfect union with God.

*“By dens of lions encompassed.”*

4. The dens of lions signify the virtues with which the soul is endowed in the state of union. The dens of lions are safe retreats, protected from all other animals, who, afraid of the boldness and strength of the lion within, are afraid not only to enter, but even to appear in sight. So each virtue of the soul in the state of

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 1:15

<sup>2</sup> Prov. 8:31

perfection is like a den of lions where Christ dwells united to the soul in that virtue; and in every one of them as a strong lion. The soul also, united to Him in those very virtues, is as a strong lion, because it then partakes of the perfections of God.

5. Thus, then, the perfect soul is so defended, so strong in virtue, and in all virtues together, reposing on the flowery bed of its union with God, that the evil spirits are not only afraid to assault it, but even dare not appear before it; such is their dread of it, when they behold it strong, courageous, and mature in its perfect virtues, on the bed of the Beloved. The evil spirits fear a soul transformed in the union of love as much as they fear the Beloved Himself, and they dare not look upon it, for Satan is in great fear of that soul which has attained to perfection.

6. The soul's bed is encompassed by virtues: they are the dens, for when the soul has advanced to perfection, its virtues are so perfectly ordered, and so joined together and bound up one with another, each supporting the other, that no part of it is weak or exposed. Not only is Satan unable to penetrate within it, but even worldly things, whether great or little, fail to disturb or annoy it, or even move it; for being now free from all molestation of natural affections, and a stranger to the worry of temporal anxieties, it enjoys in security and peace the participation of God.

7. This is that for which the bride longed when she said, "Who shall give to me You my brother, sucking the breast of my mother, that I may find You without, and kiss You, and now no man may despise me?"<sup>1</sup> The "kiss" here is the union of which I am speaking, whereby the soul, by love, becomes in a sense the equal of God. This is the object it desires when it says, "Who shall give to me You my brother?" That means and makes equality. "Sucking the breast of my mother"; that is, destroying all the imperfections and desires of nature which the soul inherits from its mother Eve. "That I may find You without"; that is, "be united to You alone, away from all things, in detachment of the will and desires." "And now no man may despise me"; that is, the world, the devil, and the flesh will not venture to assail it, for being free and purified, and also united to God, none of these can molest it. Thus, then, the soul is in the enjoyment now of habitual sweetness and tranquillity that never fail it.

8. But beside this habitual contentment and peace, the flowers of the virtues of this garden so open in the soul and diffuse their odors that it seems to be, and is, full of the delights of God. I say that the flowers open; because the soul, though filled with the virtues in perfection, is not always in the actual fruition of them, notwithstanding its habitual perception of the peace and tranquillity which they produce. We may say of these virtues that they are in this life like the budding flowers of a garden; they offer a most beautiful sight—opening under the inspirations of the Holy Spirit—and diffuse most marvelous perfumes in great variety.

9. Sometimes the soul will discern in itself the mountain flowers—the fullness, grandeur, and beauty of God—intermingled with the lilies of the valley—rest, refreshment, and defense; and again among them, the fragrant roses of the strange islands—the strange knowledge of God; and further, the perfume of the

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 8:1

water lilies of the roaring torrents—the majesty of God filling the whole soul. And amid all this, it enjoys the exquisite fragrance of the jasmine, and the whisper of the amorous gales, the fruition of which is granted to the soul in the estate of union, and in the same way all the other virtues and graces, the calm knowledge, silent music, murmuring solitude, and the sweet supper of love; and the joy of all this is such as to make the soul say in truth, “Our bed is of flowers, by dens of lions encompassed.” Blessed is that soul which in this life deserves at times to enjoy the perfume of these divine flowers.

*“Hung with purple.”*

10. Purple in Holy Scripture means charity, and kings are clad in it, and for that reason the soul says that the bed of flowers is hung with purple, because all the virtues, riches, and blessings of it are sustained, flourish, and are delighted only in charity and love of the King of heaven; without that love the soul can never delight in the bed nor in the flowers thereof. All these virtues, therefore, are, in the soul, as if hung on the love of God, as on that which preserves them, and they are, as it were, bathed in love; for all and each of them always make the soul love God, and on all occasions and in all actions they advance in love to a greater love of God. That is what is meant by saying that the bed is hung with purple.

11. This is well expressed in the sacred Cantic: “King Solomon has made himself a litter of the wood of Lebanon; the pillars thereof he has made of silver, the seat of gold, the going up of purple; the midst he has paved with charity.”<sup>1</sup> The virtues and graces which God lays in the bed of the soul are signified by the wood of Lebanon: the pillars of silver and the seat of gold are love, for, as I have said, the virtues are maintained by love, and by the love of God and of the soul are ordered and bring forth fruit.

*“Made in peace.”*

12. This is the fourth excellence of the bed, and depends on the third, of which I have just spoken. For the third is perfect charity, the property of which is, as the Apostle says, to cast out fear;<sup>2</sup> hence the perfect peace of the soul, which is the fourth excellence of this bed. For the clearer understanding of this we must keep in mind that each virtue is in itself peaceful, gentle, and strong, and consequently, in the soul which possesses them, produces peace, gentleness, and fortitude. Now, as the bed is of flowers, formed of the flowers of virtues, all of which are peaceful, gentle, and strong, it follows that the bed is wrought in peace, and the soul is peaceful, gentle, and strong, which are three qualities unassailable by the world, Satan, and the flesh. The virtues preserve the soul in such peace and security that it seems to be wholly built up in peace. The fifth property of this bed of flowers is explained in the following words:

*“Crowned with a thousand shields of gold.”*

13. The shields are the virtues and graces of the soul, which, though they are also the flowers, serve for its crown, and the reward of the toil by which they are acquired. They serve also, like strong shields, as a protection against the vices,

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 3:9,10

<sup>2</sup> 1 John 4:18

which it overcame by the practice of them; and the bridal bed of flowers therefore—that is, the virtues, the crown and defense—is adorned with them by way of reward, and protected by them as with a shield. The shields are said to be of gold, to show the great worth of the virtues. The bride in the Canticle sets forth the same truth, saying: “Three score valiant men of the most valiant of Israel surround the little bed of Solomon, all holding swords; . . . every man’s sword upon his thigh, because of fears in the night.”<sup>1</sup>

14. Thus in this stanza the bride speaks of a thousand shields, to express the variety of the virtues, gifts, and graces with which God has endowed the soul in this state. The Bridegroom also in the Canticle has employed the same expression, in order to show forth the innumerable virtues of the soul, saying: “Your neck is as the tower of David, which is built with bulwarks; a thousand shields hang upon it, all the armor of valiant men.”<sup>2</sup>

#### NOTE

THE soul, having attained to perfection, is not satisfied with magnifying and extolling the excellencies of the Beloved, the Son of God, nor with recounting and giving thanks for the graces received at His hands and the joy into which it has entered, but recounts also the graces conferred on other souls. In this blessed union of love the soul is able to contemplate both its own and others’ graces; thus praising Him and giving Him thanks for the many graces bestowed upon others, it sings as in the following stanza:

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 3:7,8

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 4:4

## STANZA XXV

*In Your footsteps  
The young ones run Your way;  
At the touch of the fire  
And by the spiced wine,  
The divine balsam flows.*

HERE the bride gives thanks to her Beloved for three graces which devout souls receive from Him, by which they encourage and excite themselves to love God more and more. She speaks of them here because she has had experience of them herself in this state of union. The first is sweetness, which He gives them, and which is so efficacious that it makes them run swiftly on the road of perfection. The second is a visit of love, by which they are suddenly set on fire with love. The third is overflowing charity infused into them, with which He so inebriates them that they are as much excited by it as by the visit of love, to utter the praises of God, and to love Him with all sweetness.

*“In Your footsteps.”*

2. These are the marks on the ground by which we trace the course of one we seek. The sweetness and knowledge of Himself which God communicates to the soul that seeks Him are the footsteps by which it traces and recognizes Him. Thus the soul says to the Word, the Bridegroom, “In Your footsteps”—“in the traces of Your sweetness which You diffuse, and the odors which You scatter.”

*“The young ones run Your way.”*

3. “Devout souls run with youthful vigor in the sweetness which Your footsteps communicate.” They run in many ways and in various directions—each according to the spirit which God bestows and the vocation He has given—in the diversified forms of spiritual service on the road of everlasting life, which is evangelical perfection, where they meet the Beloved in the union of love, in spiritual detachment from all things.

4. This sweetness and impression of Himself which God leaves in the soul render it light and active in running after Him; for the soul then does little or nothing in its own strength towards running along this road, being rather attracted by the divine footsteps, so that it not only advances, but even runs, as I said before, in many ways. The bride in the Canticle, therefore, prays for the divine attraction, saying, “Draw me, we will run after You to the odor of Your ointments”;<sup>1</sup> and David says, “I have run the way of Your commandments, when You dilated my heart.”<sup>2</sup>

*“At the touch of the fire, and by the spiced wine,  
the divine balsam flows.”*

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 1:3

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 118:32



5. I said, while explaining the previous lines, that souls run in His footsteps in the way of exterior works. But the three lines I have just quoted refer to the interior acts of the will, when souls are under the influence of the other two graces, and interior visits of the Beloved. These are the touch of fire, and spiced wine; and the interior act of the will, which is the result of these visits, is the flowing of the divine balsam. The contact of the fire is that most delicate touch of the Beloved which the soul feels at times even when least expecting it, and which sets the heart on fire with love, as if a spark of fire had fallen upon it and made it burn. Then the will, in an instant, like one roused from sleep, burns with the fire of love, longs for God, praises Him and gives Him thanks, worships and honors Him, and prays to Him in the sweetness of love.

6. This is the flowing of the divine balsam, which obeys the touch of the fire that issues forth from the consuming love of God which that fire kindled; the divine balsam which comforts the soul and heals it with its odor and its substance.

7. The bride in the Canticle speaks of this divine touch, saying, "My Beloved put His hand through the opening, and my belly trembled at His touch."<sup>1</sup> The touch of the Beloved is the touch of love, and His hand is the grace He bestows upon the soul, and the opening through which He puts His hand is the vocation and the perfection, at least the degree of perfection of the soul; for accordingly will His touch be heavier or lighter, in proportion to its spiritual state. The belly that trembled is the will, in which the touch is effected, and the trembling is the stirring up of the desires and affections to love, long for, and praise God, which is the flowing of the balsam from this touch.

8. "The spiced wine" is that exceedingly great grace which God sometimes bestows upon advanced souls, when the Holy Spirit inebriates them with the sweet, luscious, and strong wine of love. Hence it is here called spiced wine, for as such wine is prepared by fermentation with many and diverse aromatic and strengthening herbs; so this love, the gift of God to the perfect, is in the soul prepared and seasoned with the virtues already acquired. This love, seasoned with the precious spices, communicates to the soul such a strong, abundant inebriation when God visits it that it pours forth with great effect and force those acts of rapturous praise, love, and worship which I referred to before, and that with a marvelous longing to labor and to suffer for Him.

9. This sweet inebriation and grace, however, do not pass quickly away, like the touch of the fire, for they are of longer continuance. The fire touches and passes, but the effects abide often; and sometimes the spiced wine continues for a considerable time, and its effects also; this is the sweet love of the soul, and continues occasionally a day or two, sometimes even many days together, though not always in the same degree of intensity, because it is not in the power of the soul to control it. Sometimes the soul, without any effort of its own, is conscious of a most sweet interior inebriation, and of the divine love burning within, as David says, "My heart waxed hot within me, and in my meditation a fire shall burn."<sup>2</sup>

10. The outpourings of this inebriation last sometimes as long as the inebriation

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 5:4

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 38:4

itself. At other times there are no outpourings; and they are more or less intense when they occur, in proportion to the greater or less intensity of the inebriation itself. But the outpourings, or effects of the fire, generally last longer than the fire which caused them; indeed the fire leaves them behind in the soul, and they are more vehement than those which proceed from the inebriation, for sometimes this divine fire burns up and consumes the soul in love.

11. As I have mentioned fermented wine, it will be well to touch briefly upon the difference between it, when it is old, and new wine; the difference between old wine and new wine is the same, and will furnish a little instruction for spiritual men. New wine has not settled on the lees, and is therefore fermenting; we cannot ascertain its quality or worth before it has settled, and the fermentation has ceased, for until then there is great risk of its corruption. The taste of it is rough and sharp, and an immoderate draught of it intoxicates. Old wine has settled on the lees, and ferments no more like new wine; the quality of it is easily ascertained and it is now very safe from corruption, for all fermentation which might have proved pernicious has entirely ceased. Well-fermented wine is very rarely spoiled, the taste of it is pleasant, and its strength is in its own substance, not in the taste, and drinking it produces health and a sound constitution.

12. New lovers are compared to new wine; these are beginners in the service of God, because the fervor of their love manifests itself outwardly in the senses; because they have not settled on the lees of sense, frail and imperfect; and because they measure the strength of love by the sweetness of it, for it is sensible sweetness that ordinarily gives them their strength for good works, and it is by this they are influenced; we must, therefore, place no confidence in this love till the fermentation has subsided, with the coarse satisfaction of sense.

13. For as these fervors and sensible warmth may incline men to good and perfect love, and serve as an excellent means to it, when the lees of imperfections are cleared; so also is it very easy at first, when sensible sweetness is fresh, for the wine of love to fail, and the sweetness of the new to vanish. New lovers are always anxious, sensibly tormented by their love; it is necessary for them to put some restraint upon themselves, for if they are very active in the strength of this wine, their natural powers will be ruined with these anxieties and fatigues of the new wine, which is rough and sharp, and not made sweet in the perfect fermentation, which then takes place when the anxieties of love are over, as I shall show immediately.

14. The Wise Man employs the same illustration; saying, "A new friend is as new wine; it shall grow old, and you shall drink it with pleasure."<sup>1</sup> Old lovers, therefore, who have been tried and proved in the service of the Bridegroom, are like old wine settled on the lees; they have no sensible emotions, nor outbursts of exterior zeal, but they taste the sweetness of the wine of love, now thoroughly fermented, not sweet to the senses as was that of the love of beginners, but rather settled within the soul in the substance and sweetness of the spirit, and in perfect good works. Such souls as these do not seek after sensible sweetness and fervors, neither do they wish for them, lest they should suffer from loathing and weariness; for he who gives the reins to his desires in matters of sense must of necessity suffer pain and loathing, both in mind and body.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ecclus. 9:15

15. Old lovers, therefore, free from that spiritual sweetness which has its roots in the senses, suffer neither in sense nor spirit from the anxieties of love, and thus scarcely ever prove faithless to God, because they have risen above that which might be an occasion of falling, namely, the flesh. These now drink of the wine of love, which is not only fermented and free from the lees, but spiced also with the aromatic herbs of perfect virtues, which will not allow it to corrupt, as may happen to new wine.

16. For this cause an old friend is of great price in the eyes of God: "Forsake not an old friend, for the new will not be like to him."<sup>1</sup> It is through this wine of love, tried and spiced, that the divine Beloved produces in the soul that divine inebriation, under the influence of which it sends forth to God the sweet and delicious outpourings. The meaning of these three lines, therefore, is as follows: "At the touch of the fire, by which You stir up the soul, and by the spiced wine with which You do so lovingly inebriate it, the soul pours forth the acts and movements of love which are Your work within it."

#### NOTE

SUCH, then, is the state of the blessed soul in the bed of flowers, where all these blessings, and many more, are granted it. The seat of that bed is the Son of God, and the hangings of it are the charity and love of the Bridegroom Himself. The soul now may say, with the bride, "His left hand is under my head,"<sup>2</sup> and we may therefore say, in truth, that such a soul is clothed in God, and bathed in the Divinity, and that, not as it were on the surface, but in the interior spirit, and filled with the divine delights in the abundance of the spiritual waters of life; for it experiences that which David says of those who have drawn near to God: "They shall be inebriated with the plenty of Your house, and You shall make them drink of the torrent of Your pleasure, for with You is the fountain of life."<sup>3</sup>

2. This fullness will be in the very being of the soul, seeing that its drink is nothing else but the torrent of delights, and that torrent the Holy Spirit, as it is written: "And he showed me a river of living water, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and the Lamb."<sup>4</sup> This water, being the very love itself of God, flows into the soul, so that it drinks of the torrent of love, which is the spirit of the Bridegroom infused into the soul in union. Thence the soul in the overflowing of its love sings the following stanza:

---

<sup>1</sup> Ecclus. 9:14

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 2:6

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 35:9

<sup>4</sup> Rev. 22:1

## STANZA XXVI

*In the inner cellar  
Of my Beloved have I drunk; and when I went forth  
Over all the plain  
I knew nothing,  
And lost the flock I followed before.*

HERE the soul speaks of that sovereign grace of God in taking it to Himself into the house of His love, which is the union, or transformation of love in God. It describes two effects proceeding therefrom: forgetfulness of, and detachment from, all the things of this world, and the mortification of its tastes and desires.

*“In the inner cellar.”*

2. In order to explain in any degree the meaning of this, I have need of the special help of the Holy Spirit to direct my hand and guide my pen. The cellar is the highest degree of love to which the soul may attain in this life, and is therefore said to be the inner. It follows from this that there are other cellars not so interior; that is, the degrees of love by which souls reach this, the last. These cellars are seven in number, and the soul has entered into them all when it has in perfection the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, so far as it is possible for it. When the soul has the spirit of fear in perfection, it has in perfection also the spirit of love, inasmuch as this fear, the last of the seven gifts, is filial fear, and the perfect fear of a son proceeds from his perfect love of his father. Thus when the Holy Scripture speaks of one as having perfect charity, it says of him that he fears God. So the prophet Isaiah, announcing the perfections of Christ, says of Him, “The spirit of the fear of the Lord shall replenish him.”<sup>1</sup> Holy Simeon also is spoken of by the Evangelist as a “just man full of fear,”<sup>2</sup> and the same applies to many others.

3. Many souls reach and enter the first cellar, each according to the perfection of its love, but the last and inmost cellar is entered by few in this world, because therein is wrought the perfect union with God, the union of the spiritual marriage, of which the soul is now speaking. What God communicates to the soul in this intimate union is utterly ineffable, beyond the reach of all possible words—just as it is impossible to speak of God Himself so as to convey any idea of what He is—because it is God Himself who communicates Himself to the soul now in the marvelous bliss of its transformation. In this state God and the soul are united, as the window is with the light, or coal with the fire, or the light of the stars with that of the sun, yet, however, not so essentially and completely as it will be in the life to come. The soul, therefore, to show what it received from the hands of God in the cellar of wine, says nothing else, and I do not believe that anything could be said but the words which follow:

*“Of my Beloved have I drunk.”*

---

<sup>1</sup> Isa. 11:3

<sup>2</sup> Luke 2:25. Justus et timoratus.

4. As a draught diffuses itself through all the members and veins of the body, so this communication of God diffuses itself substantially in the whole soul, or rather, the soul is transformed in God. In this transformation the soul drinks of God in its very substance and its spiritual powers. In the understanding it drinks wisdom and knowledge, in the will the sweetest love, in the memory refreshment and delight in the thought and sense of its bliss. That the soul receives and drinks delight in its very substance, appears from the words of the bride in the Cantic: “My soul melted as He spoke”<sup>1</sup>—that is, when the Bridegroom communicated Himself to the soul.

5. That the understanding drinks wisdom is evident from the words of the bride longing and praying for the kiss of union: “There You shall teach me, and I will give you a cup of spiced wine.”<sup>2</sup> “You shall teach me wisdom and knowledge in love, and I will give You a cup of spiced wine—that is, my love mingled with Yours.” The bride says that the will also drinks of love, saying: “He brought me into the cellar of wine; He has ordered in me charity,”<sup>3</sup>—that is, “He gave me His love, embracing me, to drink of love”; or, to speak more clearly, “He ordered in me His charity, tempering His charity and to the purpose making it mine.” This is to give the soul to drink of the very love of its Beloved, which the Beloved infuses into it.

6. There is a common saying that the will cannot love that of which the understanding has no knowledge. This, however, is to be understood in the order of nature, it being impossible, in a natural way, to love anything unless we first know what it is we love. But in a supernatural way God can certainly infuse love and increase it without infusing and increasing distinct knowledge, as is evident from the texts already quoted. Yes, many spiritual persons have experience of this; their love of God burns more and more, while their knowledge does not grow. Men may know little and love much, and on the other hand, know much and love but little.

7. In general, those spiritual persons whose knowledge of God is not very great are usually very rich in all that belongs to the will, and infused faith suffices them for this knowledge, by means of which God infuses and increases charity in them and the acts thereof, which are to love Him more and more though knowledge is not increased. Thus the will may drink of love while the understanding drinks in no fresh knowledge. In the present instance, however, all the powers of the soul together, because of the union in the inner cellar, drink of the Beloved.

8. As to the memory, it is clear that the soul drinks of the Beloved in it, because it is enlightened with the light of the understanding in remembering the blessings it possesses and enjoys in union with the Beloved.

*“And when I went forth.”*

9. That is, after this grace: the divine draught having so deified the soul, exalted it, and inebriated it in God. Though the soul is always in the high estate of marriage ever since God has placed it there, nevertheless actual union in all its

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 5:6

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 8:2

<sup>3</sup> Cant. 2:4

powers is not continuous, though the substantial union is. In this substantial union the powers of the soul are most frequently in union, and drink of His cellar, the understanding by knowledge, the will by love, etc. We are not, therefore, to suppose that the soul, when saying that it went out, has ceased from its substantial or essential union with God, but only from the union of its faculties, which is not, and cannot be, permanent in this life; it is from this union, then, it went forth when it wandered over all the plain—that is, through the whole breadth of the world.

*“I knew nothing.”*

10. This draught of God’s most deep wisdom makes the soul forget all the things of this world, and consider all its previous knowledge, and the knowledge of the whole world besides, as pure ignorance in comparison with this knowledge.

11. For a clearer understanding of this, we must remember that the most regular cause of the soul’s ignoring the things of the world, when it has ascended to this high state, is that it is informed by a supernatural knowledge, in the presence of which all natural and worldly knowledge is ignorance rather than knowledge. For the soul in possession of this knowledge, which is most profound, learns from it that all other knowledge not included in this knowledge is not knowledge, but ignorance, and worthless. We have this truth in the words of the Apostle when he said that “the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”<sup>1</sup>

12. This is the reason why the soul says it knows nothing, now that it has drunk of the divine wisdom. The truth is that the wisdom of men and of the whole world is mere ignorance, and not deserving any attention, but it is a truth that can be learned only in that truth of the presence of God in the soul communicating to it His wisdom and making it strong by this draught of love that it may see it distinctly. This is taught us by Solomon, saying: “The vision that the man spoke, with whom God is, and who being strengthened by God abiding with him, said: I am the most foolish of men, and the wisdom of men is not with me.”<sup>2</sup>

13. When the soul is raised to this high wisdom of God, the wisdom of man is in its eyes the lowest ignorance: all natural science and the works of God, if accompanied by ignorance of Him, are as ignorance; for where He is not known, there nothing is known. “The deep things of God are foolishness to men.”<sup>3</sup> Thus the divinely wise and the worldly wise are fools in the estimation of each other; for the latter cannot understand the wisdom and science of God, nor the former those of the world, for the wisdom of the world is ignorance in comparison with the wisdom of God; and the wisdom of God is ignorance with respect to that of the world.

14. Moreover, this deification and elevation of the spirit in God, whereby the soul is, as it were, rapt and absorbed in love, one with God, suffer it not to dwell upon any worldly matter. The soul is now detached, not only from all outward things, but even from itself: it is, as it were, undone, assumed by, and dissolved in, love—that is, it passes out of itself into the Beloved. Thus the bride, in the Cantic, after

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 3:19

<sup>2</sup> Prov. 30:1,2

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. 2:14

speaking of her own transformation by love into the Beloved, expresses her state of ignorance by the words "I knew not."<sup>1</sup> The soul is now, in a certain sense, like Adam in paradise, who knew no evil. It is so innocent that it sees no evil; neither does it consider anything to be amiss. It will hear much that is evil, and will see it with its eyes, and yet it shall not be able to understand it, because it has no evil habits whereby to judge of it. God has rooted out of it those imperfect habits and that ignorance resulting from the evil of sin, by the perfect habit of true wisdom. Thus, also, the soul knows nothing on this subject.

15. Such a soul will scarcely intermeddle with the affairs of others, because it forgets even its own; for the work of the Spirit of God in the soul in which He dwells is to incline it to ignore those things which do not concern it, especially such as do not minister to edification. The Spirit of God abides within the soul to withdraw it from outward things rather than to lead it among them; and thus the soul knows nothing as it knew it formerly. We are not, however, to suppose that it loses the habits of knowledge previously acquired, for those habits are improved by the more perfect habit of supernatural knowledge infused, though these habits are not so powerful as to necessitate knowledge through them, and yet there is no reason why they should not do so occasionally.

16. In this union of the divine wisdom, these habits are united with the higher wisdom of other knowledge, as a little light with another which is great; it is the great light that shines, overwhelming the less, yet the latter is not therefore lost, but rather perfected, though it is not the light which shines pre-eminently. Thus, I imagine, will it be in heaven; the acquired habits of knowledge in the just will not be destroyed, though they will be of no great importance there, seeing that the just will know more in the divine wisdom than by the habits acquired on earth.

17. But the particular notions and forms of things, acts of the imagination, and every other apprehension having form and figure are all lost and ignored in this absorbing love, and this for two reasons. First, the soul cannot actually attend to anything of the kind, because it is actually absorbed by this draught of love. Secondly, and this is the principal reason, its transformation in God so conforms it to His purity and simplicity—for there is no form or imaginary figure in Him—as to render it pure, cleansed and empty of all the forms and figures it entertained before, being now purified and enlightened in simple contemplation. All spots and stains in the glass become invisible when the sun shines upon it, but they appear again as soon as the light of the sun is withheld.

18. So is it with the soul; while the effects of this act of love continue, this ignorance continues also, so that it cannot observe anything in particular until these effects have ceased. Love has set the soul on fire and transmuted it into love, has annihilated it and destroyed it as to all that is not love, according to the words of David: "My heart has been inflamed, and my reins have been changed; and I am brought to nothing, and I knew not."<sup>2</sup> The changing of the reins, because the heart is inflamed, is the changing of the soul, in all its desires and actions, in God, into a new manner of life, the utter undoing and annihilation of the old man, and therefore the prophet said that he was brought to nothing and knew not.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 6:11

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 72:21,22

19. These are the two effects of drinking the wine of the cellar of God; not only is all previous knowledge brought to nothing and made to vanish, but the old life also with its imperfections is destroyed, and into the new man renewed; this is the second of the two effects described in the words that follow:

*“And lost the flock I followed before.”*

20. Until the soul reaches the state of perfection, however spiritual it may be, there always remains a troop of desires, likings, and other imperfections, sometimes natural, sometimes spiritual, after which it runs, and which it tries to feed while following and satisfying them. With regard to the understanding, there are certain imperfections of the desire of knowledge. With regard to the will, certain likings and peculiar desires, at times in temporal things, as the wish to possess certain trifles, and attachment to some things more than to others, certain prejudices, considerations, and punctilios, with other vanities, still savoring of the world: and again in natural things, such as eating and drinking, the preference of one kind of food over another, and the choice of the best: at another time, in spiritual things, such as seeking for sweetness, and other follies of spiritual persons not yet perfect, too numerous to recount here. As to the memory, there are many inconsistencies, anxieties, unseemly reminiscences, which drag the soul captive after them.

21. The four passions of the soul also involve it in many useless hopes, joys, griefs, and fears, after which it runs. As to this flock, some men are more influenced by it than others; they run after and follow it, until they enter the inner cellar, where they lose it altogether, being then transformed in love. In that cellar the flock of imperfections is easily destroyed, as rust and mold on metal in the fire. Then the soul feels itself free from the pettiness of self-likings and the vanities after which it ran before, and may well say, “I have lost the flock which I followed before.”

#### NOTE

GOD communicates Himself to the soul in this interior union with a love so intense that the love of a mother, who so tenderly caresses her child, the love of a brother, or the affection of a friend bear no likeness to it, for so great is the tenderness, and so deep is the love with which the Infinite Father comforts and exalts the humble and loving soul. O wonders worthy of all awe and reverence! He humbles Himself in reality before that soul that He may exalt it, as if He were its servant, and the soul His lord. He is as anxious to comfort it as if He were a slave, and the soul God. So great is the humility and tenderness of God. In this communion of love He renders in a certain way those services to the soul which He says in the Gospel He will perform for the elect in heaven. “Amen, I say to you, that He will gird Himself and make them sit down to meat, and passing will minister to them.”<sup>1</sup>

2. This very service He renders now to the soul, comforting and cherishing it, as a mother her child whom she nurtures in her bosom. And the soul recognizes herein the truth of the words of Isaiah, “You shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you.”<sup>2</sup> What must the feelings of the soul be amid

<sup>1</sup> Luke 12:37

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 66:12



these sovereign graces? How it will melt away in love, beholding the bosom of God opened for it with such overflowing love. When the soul perceives itself in the midst of these delights, it surrenders itself wholly to God, gives to Him the breasts of its own will and love, and under the influence thereof addresses the Beloved in the words of the bride in the Cantic, saying: "I to my Beloved, and His turning is towards me. Come, my Beloved, let us go forth into the field, let us abide in the villages. Let us rise early to the vineyards, let us see if the vineyard flourish, if the flowers are ready to bring forth fruits, if the pomegranates flourish; there will I give You my breasts"<sup>1</sup>—that is, "I will employ all the joy and strength of my will in the service of Your love." This mutual surrender in this union of the soul and God is the subject of the stanza which follows:

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 7:10-12

## STANZA XXVII

*There He gave me His breasts,  
There He taught me the science full of sweetness.  
And there I gave to Him  
Myself without reserve;  
There I promised to be His bride.*

HERE the soul speaks of the two contracting parties in this spiritual betrothal, itself and God. In the inner cellar of love they both met together, God giving to the soul the breasts of His love freely, whereby He instructs it in His mysteries and wisdom, and the soul also actually surrendering itself, making no reservation whatever either in its own favor or in that of others, promising to be His for ever.

*“There He gave me His breasts.”*

2. To give the breast to another is to love and cherish him and communicate one's secrets to him as a friend. The soul says here that God gave it His breasts—that is, He gave it His love and communicated His secrets to it. It is thus that God deals with the soul in this state, and more, too, as it appears from the words that follow:

*“There He taught me the science full of sweetness.”*

3. This science is mystical theology, which is the secret science of God, and which spiritual men call contemplation. It is most full of sweetness because it is knowledge by love, love is the master of it, and it is love that renders it all so sweet. Inasmuch as this science and knowledge are communicated to the soul in that love with which God communicates Himself, it is sweet to the understanding, because knowledge belongs to it, and sweet to the will, because it comes by love which belongs to the will.

*“There I gave to Him myself without reserve”*

4. The soul in this sweet draught of God, surrenders itself wholly to Him most willingly and with great sweetness; it desires to be wholly His, and never to retain anything which is unbecoming His Majesty. God is the author of this union, and of the purity and perfection requisite for it; and as the transformation of the soul in Himself makes it His, He empties it of all that is alien to Himself. Thus it comes to pass that, not in will only, but in act as well, the whole soul is entirely given to God without any reserve whatever, as God has given Himself freely to it. The will of God and of the soul are both satisfied, each given up to the other, in mutual delight, so that neither fails the other in the faith and constancy of the betrothal; therefore the soul says:

*“There I promised to be His bride.”*

5. As a bride does not give her love to another, and as all her thoughts and actions are directed to her bridegroom only, so the soul now has no affections of the will,

no acts of the understanding, neither object nor occupation of any kind which it does not wholly refer to God, together with all its desires. The soul is, as it were, absorbed in God, and even its first movements have nothing in them—so far as it can comprehend them—which is at variance with the will of God. The first movements of an imperfect soul in general are, at least, inclined to evil, in the understanding, the memory, the will, the desires and imperfections; but those of the soul which has attained to the spiritual state of which I am speaking are ordinarily directed to God, because of the great help and courage it derives from Him, and its perfect conversion to goodness. This is set forth with great clearness by David, when he says: “Shall not my soul be subject to God? For from Him is my salvation. For He is my God and my Savior; He is my protector, I shall be moved no more.”<sup>1</sup> “He is my protector” means that the soul, being now received under the protection of God and united to Him, is no longer subject to any movements contrary to God.

6. It is quite clear from this that the soul which has attained the spiritual betrothal knows nothing else but the love of the Bridegroom and the delights thereof, because it has arrived at perfection, the form and substance of which is love, according to St. Paul.<sup>2</sup> The more a soul loves, the more perfect it is in its love, and hence it follows that the soul which is already perfect is, if we may say so, all love, all its actions are love, all its energies and strength are occupied in love. It gives up all it has, like the wise merchant,<sup>3</sup> for this treasure of love which it finds hidden in God, and which is so precious in His sight, and the Beloved cares for nothing else but love; the soul, therefore, anxious to please Him perfectly, occupies itself wholly in pure love for God, not only because love does so occupy it, but also because the love wherein it is united influences it towards love of God in and through all things. As the bee draws honey from all plants, and makes use of them only for that end, so the soul most easily draws the sweetness of love from all that happens to it; makes all things subserve it towards loving God, whether they are sweet or bitter; and being animated and protected by love, has no sense, feeling, or knowledge, because, as I have said, it knows nothing but love, and in all its occupations, its joy is its love of God. This is explained by the following stanza.

#### NOTE

I HAVE said that God is pleased with nothing but love; but before I explain this, it will be as well to set forth the grounds on which the assertion rests. All our works, and all our labors, however grand they may be, are nothing in the sight of God, for we can give Him nothing, neither can we by them fulfill His desire, which is the growth of our soul. As to Himself He desires nothing of this, for He has need of nothing, and so, if He is pleased with anything it is with the growth of the soul; and as there is no way in which the soul can grow but in becoming in a manner equal to Him, for this reason He is only pleased with our love. It is the property of love to place him who loves on an equality with the object of his love. Hence the soul, because of its perfect love, is called the bride of the Son of God, which signifies equality with Him. In this equality and friendship all things are common, as the Bridegroom Himself said to His disciples: “I have called you

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 61:2,3

<sup>2</sup> Col. 3:14

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 13:44

friends, because all things, whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you.”<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> John 15:15

## STANZA XXVIII

*My soul is occupied,  
And all my substance in His service;  
Now I guard no flock,  
Nor have I any other employment:  
My sole occupation is love.*

THE soul, or rather the bride having given herself wholly to the Bridegroom without any reserve whatever, now recounts to the Beloved how she fulfills her task. "My soul and body," she says, "all my abilities and all my capacities, are occupied not with other matters, but with those pertaining to the service of the Bridegroom." She is therefore not seeking her own proper satisfaction, nor the gratification of her own inclinations, neither does she occupy herself in anything whatever which is alien to God; yes, even her communion with God Himself is nothing else but acts of love, inasmuch as she has changed her former mode of conversing with Him into loving.

*"My soul is occupied."*

2. This refers to the soul's surrender of itself to the Beloved in this union of love, wherein it devotes itself, with all its faculties, understanding, will, and memory, to His service. The understanding is occupied in considering what most tends to His service, in order that it might be accomplished; the will in loving all that is pleasing to God, and in desiring Him in all things; the memory in recalling what ministers to Him, and what may be more pleasing to Him.

*"And all my substance in His service."*

3. By substance here is meant all that relates to the sensual part of the soul, which includes the body, with all its powers, interior and exterior, together with all its natural capacities—that is, the four passions, the natural desires, and the whole substance of the soul, all of which is employed in the service of the Beloved, as well as the rational and spiritual part, as I explained in the previous section. As to the body, that is now ordered according to God in all its interior and exterior senses, all the acts of which are directed to God; the four passions of the soul are also under control in Him; for the soul's joy, hope, fear, and grief are conversant with God only; all its appetites, and all its anxieties also, are directed to Him only.

4. The whole substance of the soul is now so occupied with God, so intent upon Him, that its very first movements, even inadvertently, have God for their object and their end. The understanding, memory, and will tend directly to God; the affections, senses, desires and longings, hope and joy, the whole substance of the soul, rise instantly towards God, though the soul is making no conscious efforts in that direction. Such a soul is very often doing the work of God, intent upon Him and the things of God, without thinking or reflecting on what it is doing for Him. The constant and habitual practice of this has deprived it of all conscious reflection, and even of that fervor which it usually had when it began to act. The whole substance of the soul being thus occupied, what follows cannot be but true

also.

*“Now I guard no flock.”*

5. “I do not now go after my likings and desires; for having fixed them upon God, I no longer feed or guard them.” The soul not only does not guard them now, but has no other occupation than to wait upon God.

*“Nor have I any other employment.”*

6. Before the soul succeeded in effecting this gift and surrender of itself, and of all that belongs to it, to the Beloved, it was entangled in many unprofitable occupations, by which it sought to please itself and others, and it may be said that its occupations of this kind were as many as its habits of imperfection.

7. To these habits belong that of speaking, thinking, and the doing of things that are useless; and likewise, the not making use of these things according to the requirements of the soul's perfection; other desires also the soul may have, with which it ministers to the desires of others, to which may be referred display, compliments, flattery, human respect, aiming at being well thought of, and the giving pleasure to people, and other useless actions, by which it labored to content them, wasting its efforts herein, and finally all its strength. All this is over, says the soul here, for all its words, thoughts, and works are directed to God, and, conversant with Him, freed from their previous imperfections. It is as if it said: “I follow no longer either my own or other men's likings, neither do I occupy or entertain myself with useless pastimes, or the things of this world.”

*“My sole occupation is love.”*

8. “All my occupation now is the practice of the love of God, all the powers of soul and body, memory, understanding, and will, interior and exterior senses, the desires of spirit and of sense, all work in and by love. All I do is done in love; all I suffer, I suffer in the sweetness of love.” This is the meaning of David when he said, “I will keep my strength to You.”<sup>1</sup>

9. When the soul has arrived at this state all the acts of its spiritual and sensual nature, whether active or passive, and of whatever kind they may be, always occasion an increase of love and delight in God: even the act of prayer and communion with God, which was once carried on by reflections and diverse other methods, is now wholly an act of love. So much so is this the case that the soul may always say, whether occupied with temporal or spiritual things, “My sole occupation is love.” Happy life! happy state! and happy the soul which has attained to it! where all is the very substance of love, the joyous delights of the betrothal, when it may truly say to the Beloved with the bride in the Cantic, “The new and the old, my Beloved, have I kept for You”<sup>2</sup> “All that is bitter and painful I keep for Your sake, all that is sweet and pleasant I keep for You.” The meaning of the words, for my purpose, is that the soul, in the state of spiritual betrothal, is for the most part living in the union of love—that is, the will is habitually waiting lovingly on God.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 58:10

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 7:13

## NOTE

IN truth the soul is now lost to all things, and gained only to love, and the mind is no longer occupied with anything else. It is, therefore, deficient in what concerns the active life, and other exterior duties, that it may apply in earnest to the one thing which the Bridegroom has pronounced necessary;<sup>1</sup> and that is waiting upon God, and the continuous practice of His love. So precious is this in the eyes of God that He rebuked Martha because she would withdraw Mary from His feet to occupy her actively in the service of our Lord. Martha thought that she was doing everything herself, and that Mary at the feet of Christ was doing nothing. But it was far otherwise: for there is nothing better or more necessary than love. Thus, in the Canticle, the Bridegroom protects the bride, adjuring the daughters of Jerusalem—that is, all created things—not to disturb her spiritual sleep of love, nor to waken her, nor to let her open her eyes to anything till she pleased. “I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem, that you do not stir up, nor awake my beloved till she please.”<sup>2</sup>

2. Observe, however, that if the soul has not reached the state of unitive love, it is necessary for it to make acts of love, as well in the active as in the contemplative life. But when it has reached it, it is not requisite it should occupy itself in other and exterior duties—unless they are matters of obligation—which might hinder, were it but for a moment, the life of love in God, though they may minister greatly to His service; because an instant of pure love is more precious in the eyes of God and the soul, and more profitable to the Church, than all other good works together, though it may seem as if nothing were done. Thus, Mary Magdalene, though her preaching was most edifying, and might have been still more so afterwards, out of the great desire she had to please God and benefit the Church, hid herself, nevertheless, in the desert thirty years, that she might surrender herself entirely to love; for she considered that she would gain more in that way, because an instant of pure love is so much more profitable and important to the Church.

3. When the soul, then, in any degree possesses the spirit of solitary love, we must not interfere with it. We should inflict a grievous wrong upon it, and upon the Church also, if we were to occupy it, were it only for a moment, in exterior or active duties, however important they might be. When God Himself adjures all not to waken it from its love, who shall venture to do so, and be blameless? In a word, it is for this love that we are all created. Let those men of zeal, who think by their preaching and exterior works to convert the world, consider that they would be much more edifying to the Church, and more pleasing to God—setting aside the good example they would give—if they would spend at least one half their time in prayer, even though they may have not attained to the state of unitive love. Certainly they would do more, and with less trouble, by one single good work than by a thousand: because of the merit of their prayer, and the spiritual strength it supplies. To act otherwise is to beat the air, to do little more than nothing, sometimes nothing and occasionally even mischief; for God may give up such persons to vanity, so that they may seem to have done something, when in reality their outward occupations bear no fruit; for it is quite certain that good works

---

<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:42

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 3:5

cannot be done but in the power of God. O how much might be written on this subject! this, however, is not the place for it.

4. I have said this to explain the stanza that follows, in which the soul replies to those who call in question its holy tranquillity, who will have it wholly occupied with outward duties, that its light may shine before the world: these persons have no conception of the fibers and the unseen root whence the sap is drawn, and which nourish the fruit.



## STANZA XXIX

*If then on the common land  
I am no longer seen or found,  
You will say that I am lost;  
That, being enamored,  
I lost myself; and yet was found.*

THE soul replies here to a tacit reproach. Worldly people are in the habit of censuring those who give themselves up in earnest to God, regarding them as extravagant, in their withdrawal from the world, and in their manner of life. They say also of them that they are useless for all matters of importance, and lost to everything the world prizes and respects! This reproach the soul meets in the best way; boldly and courageously despising it with everything else that the world can lay to its charge. Having attained to a living love of God, it makes little account of all this; and that is not all: it confesses it itself in this stanza, and boasts that it has committed that folly, and that it is lost to the world and to itself for the Beloved.

2. That which the soul is saying here, addressing itself to the world, is in substance this: "If you see me no longer occupied with the subjects that engrossed me once, with the other pastimes of the world, say and believe that I am lost to them, and a stranger to them, yes, that I am lost of my own choice, seeking my Beloved whom I so greatly love." But that they may see that the soul's loss is gain, and not consider it folly and delusion, it adds that its loss was gain, and that it therefore lost itself deliberately.

*"If then on the common I am no longer seen or found."*

3. The common is a public place where people assemble for recreation, and where shepherds feed their flocks. By the common here is meant the world in general, where men amuse themselves and feed the herd of their desires. The soul says to the worldly-minded: "If you see me no more where I used to be before I gave myself up wholly to God, look upon me as lost, and say so": the soul rejoices in that and would have men so speak of it.

*"Say that I am lost."*

4. He who loves is not ashamed before men of what he does for God, neither does he hide it through shame though the whole world should condemn it. He who shall be ashamed to confess the Son of God before men, neglecting to do His work, the Son of God also will be ashamed to acknowledge him before His Father. "He that shall deny Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father Who is in heaven."<sup>1</sup> The soul, therefore, in the courage of its love, glories in what ministers to the honor of the Beloved, in that it has done anything for Him and is lost to the things of the world.

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 10:33

5. But few spiritual persons arrive at this perfect courage and resolution in their conduct. For though some attempt to practice it, and some even think themselves proficient therein, they never entirely lose themselves on certain points connected with the world or self, so as to be perfectly detached for the sake of Christ, despising appearances and the opinion of the world. These can never answer, "Say that I am lost," because they are not lost to themselves, and are still ashamed to confess Christ before men through human respect; these do not therefore really live in Christ.

*"That being enamored,"*

That is, practicing virtues for the love of God,

*"I lost myself; and yet was found."*

6. The soul remembers well the words of the Bridegroom in the Gospel: "No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other,"<sup>1</sup> and therefore, in order not to lose God, loses all that is not God, that is, all created things, even itself, being lost to all things for the love of Him. He who truly loves makes a shipwreck of himself in all else that he may gain the more in the object of his love. Thus the soul says that it has lost itself—that is, deliberately, of set purpose.

7. This loss occurs in two ways. The soul loses itself, making no account whatever of itself, but of the Beloved, resigning itself freely into His hands without any selfish views, losing itself deliberately, and seeking nothing for itself. Secondly, it loses itself in all things, making no account of anything save that which concerns the Beloved. This is to lose oneself—that is, to be willing that others should have all things. Such is he that loves God; he seeks neither gain nor reward, but only to lose all, even himself, according to God's will; this is what such a one counts gain. This is real gain, for the Apostle says, "to die is gain"<sup>2</sup>—that is, to die for Christ is my gain and profit spiritually. This is why the soul says that it "was found"; for he who does not know how to lose, does not find, but rather loses himself, as our Savior teaches us in the Gospel, saying, "He that will save his life shall lose it; and he that shall lose his life for My sake shall find it."<sup>3</sup>

8. But if we wish to know the deeper spiritual meaning of this line, and its peculiar fitness here, it is as follows: When a soul has advanced so far on the spiritual road as to be lost to all the natural methods of communing with God; when it seeks Him no longer by meditation, images, impressions, nor by any other created ways, or representations of sense, but only by rising above them all, in the joyful communion with Him by faith and love, then it may be said to have found God of a truth, because it has truly lost itself as to all that is not God, and also as to its own self.

#### NOTE

THE soul being thus gained, all its works are gain, for all its powers are exerted in

---

<sup>1</sup> Matt. 6:24

<sup>2</sup> Phil. 1:21

<sup>3</sup> Matt. 16:25

the spiritual intercourse of most sweet interior love with the Beloved. The interior communications between God and the soul are now so delicious, so full of sweetness, that no mortal tongue can describe them, nor human understanding comprehend them. As a bride on the day of her betrothal attends to nothing but to the joyous festival of her love, and brings forth all her jewels and ornaments for the pleasure of the bridegroom, and as he too in the same way exhibits his own magnificence and riches for the pleasure of his bride, so is it in the spiritual betrothal where the soul feels that which the bride says in the Canticle, "I to my Beloved and my Beloved to me."<sup>1</sup> The virtues and graces of the bride-soul, the grandeur and magnificence of the Bridegroom, the Son of God, come forth into the light, for the celebration of the bridal feast, communicating each to the other the goods and joys with the wine of sweet love in the Holy Spirit. The present stanza, addressed to the Bridegroom by the soul, has this for its subject.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 6:2

## STANZA XXX

*Of emeralds, and of flowers  
In the early morning gathered,  
We will make the garlands,  
Flowering in Your love,  
And bound together with one hair of my head.*

THE bride now turns to the Bridegroom and addresses Him in the intercourse and comfort of love; the subject of the stanza being the solace and delight which the bride-soul and the Son of God find in the possession of the virtues and gifts of each other, and in the exercise thereof, both rejoicing in their mutual love. Thus the soul, addressing the Beloved, says that they will make garlands rich in graces and acquired virtues, obtained at the fitting and convenient season, beautiful and lovely in the love He bears the soul, and kept together by the love which it itself has for Him. This rejoicing in virtue is what is meant by making garlands, for the soul and God rejoice together in these virtues bound up as flowers in a garland, in the common love which each bears the other.

*“Of emeralds, and of flowers.”*

2. The flowers are the virtues of the soul; the emeralds are the gifts it has received from God. Then of these flowers and emeralds

*“In the early morning gathered.”*

3. That is, acquired in youth, which is the early morning of life. They are said to be gathered because the virtues which we acquire in youth are most pleasing to God; because youth is the season when our vices most resist the acquisition of them, and when our natural inclinations are most prone to lose them. Those virtues also are more perfect which we acquire in early youth. This time of our life is the early morning; for as the freshness of the spring morning is more agreeable than any other part of the day, so also are the virtues acquired in our youth more pleasing in the sight of God.

4. By the fresh morning we may understand those acts of love by which we acquire virtue, and which are more pleasing to God than the fresh morning is to the sons of men; good works also, wrought in the season of spiritual dryness and hardness; this is the freshness of the winter morning, and what we then do for God in dryness of spirit is most precious in His eyes. Then it is that we acquire virtues and graces abundantly; and what we then acquire with toil and labor is for the most part better, more perfect and lasting than what we acquire in comfort and spiritual sweetness; for virtue sends forth its roots in the season of dryness, toil, and trial: as it is written, “Virtue is made perfect in infirmity.”<sup>1</sup> It is with a view to show forth the excellence of these virtues, of which the garland is wrought for the Beloved, that the soul says of them that they have been gathered in the early morning; because it is these flowers alone, with the emeralds of virtue, the

---

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor 12:9

choice and perfect graces, and not the imperfect, which are pleasing to the Beloved, and so the bride says:

*“We will make the garlands.”*

5. All the virtues and graces which the soul, and God in it, acquire are as a garland of diverse flowers with which the soul is marvelously adorned as with a vesture of rich embroidery. As material flowers are gathered, and then formed into a garland, so the spiritual flowers of virtues and graces are acquired and set in order in the soul: and when the acquisition is complete, the garland of perfection is complete also. The soul and the Bridegroom rejoice in it, both beautiful, adorned with the garland, as in the state of perfection.

6. These are the garlands which the soul says they will make. That is, it will wreath itself with this variety of flowers, with the emeralds of virtues and perfect gifts, that it may present itself worthily before the face of the King, and be on an equality with Him, sitting as a queen on His right hand; for it has merited this by its beauty. Thus David says, addressing himself to Christ: “The queen stood on Your right hand in vestments of gold, girt with variety.”<sup>1</sup> That is, at His right hand, clad in perfect love, girt with the variety of graces and perfect virtues.

7. The soul does not say, “I will make garlands,” nor “You will make them,” but, “We will make them,” not separately, but both together; because the soul cannot practice virtues alone, nor acquire them alone, without the help of God; neither does God alone create virtue in the soul without the soul’s concurrence. Though it is true, as the Apostle says, that “every best gift, and every perfect gift, is from above, descending from the Father of lights,”<sup>2</sup> still they enter into no soul without that soul’s concurrence and consent. Thus the bride in the Cantic says to the Bridegroom; “Draw me; we will run after you.”<sup>3</sup> Every inclination to good comes from God alone, as we learn here; but as to running, that is, good works, they proceed from God and the soul together, and it is therefore written, “We will run”—that is, both together, but not God nor the soul alone.

8. These words may also be fittingly applied to Christ and His Church, which, as His bride, says to Him, “We will make the garlands.” In this application of the words the garlands are the holy souls born to Christ in the Church. Every such soul is by itself a garland adorned with the flowers of virtues and graces, and all of them together a garland for the head of Christ the Bridegroom.

9. We may also understand by these beautiful garlands the crowns formed by Christ and the Church, of which there are three kinds. The first is formed of the beauty and white flowers of the virgins, each one with her virginal crown, and forming altogether one crown for the head of the Bridegroom Christ. The second, of the brilliant flowers of the holy doctors, each with his crown of doctor, and all together forming one crown above that of the virgins on the head of Christ. The third is composed of the purple flowers of the martyrs, each with his own crown of martyrdom, and all united into one, perfecting that on the head of Christ. Adorned with these garlands He will be so beautiful, and so lovely to behold, that

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 44:10

<sup>2</sup> James 1:17

<sup>3</sup> Cant. 1:3

heaven itself will repeat the words of the bride in the Canticle, saying: "Go forth, you daughters of Zion, and see king Solomon in the diadem with which his mother crowned him in the day of his betrothal, and in the day of the joy of his heart."<sup>1</sup> The soul then says we will make garlands.

*"Flowering in Your love."*

10. The flowering of good works and virtues is the grace and power which they derive from the love of God, without which they not only flower not, but even become dry, and worthless in the eyes of God, though they may be humanly perfect. But if He gives His grace and love they flourish in His love.

*"And bound together with one hair of my head."*

11. The hair is the will of the soul, and the love it bears the Beloved. This love performs the function of the thread that keeps the garland together. For as a thread binds the flowers of a garland, so loves knits together and sustains virtues in the soul. "Charity"—that is, love—says the Apostle, "is the bond of perfection."<sup>2</sup> Love, in the same way, binds the virtues and supernatural gifts together, so that when love fails by our departure from God, all our virtue perishes also, just as the flowers drop from the garland when the thread that bound them together is broken. It is not enough for God's gift of virtues that He should love us, but we too must love Him in order to receive them, and preserve them.

12. The soul speaks of one hair, not of many, to show that the will by itself is fixed on God, detached from all other hairs; that is, from strange love. This points out the great price and worth of these garlands of virtues; for when love is single, firmly fixed on God, as here described, the virtues also are entire, perfect, and flowering in the love of God; for the love He bears the soul is beyond all price, and the soul also knows it well.

13. Were I to attempt a description of the beauty of that binding of the flowers and emeralds together, or of the strength and majesty which their harmonious arrangement furnishes to the soul, or the beauty and grace of its embroidered vesture, expressions and words would fail me; for if God says of the evil spirit, "His body is like molten shields, shut close up with scales pressing upon one another, one is joined to another, and not so much as any air can come between them";<sup>3</sup> if the evil spirit is so strong, clad in malice thus compacted together—for the scales that cover his body like molten shields are malice, and malice is in itself but weakness—what must be the strength of the soul that is clothed in virtues so compacted and united together that no impurity or imperfection can penetrate between them; each virtue severally adding strength to strength, beauty to beauty, wealth to wealth, and to majesty, dominion and grandeur?

14. What a marvelous vision will be that of the bride-soul, when it shall sit on the right hand of the Bridegroom-King, crowned with graces! "How beautiful are your steps in shoes, O prince's daughter!"<sup>4</sup> The soul is called a prince's daughter

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 3:11

<sup>2</sup> Col. 3:14

<sup>3</sup> Job 41:6,7

<sup>4</sup> Cant. 7:1

because of the power it has; and if the beauty of the steps in shoes is great, what must be that of the whole vesture? Not only is the beauty of the soul crowned with admirable flowers, but its strength also, flowing from the harmonious order of the flowers, intertwined with the emeralds of its innumerable graces, is terrible: “Terrible as the army of a camp set in array.”<sup>1</sup> For, as these virtues and gifts of God refresh the soul with their spiritual perfume, so also, when united in it, do they, out of their substance, minister strength. Thus, in the Canticle, when the bride was weak, languishing with love—because she had not been able to bind together the flowers and the emeralds with the hair of her love—and anxious to strengthen herself by that union of them, cries out: “Stay me with flowers, compass me about with apples; because I languish with love.”<sup>2</sup> The flowers are the virtues, and the apples are the other graces.

#### NOTE

I BELIEVE I have now shown how the intertwining of the garlands and their lasting presence in the soul explain the divine union of love which now exists between the soul and God. The Bridegroom, as He says Himself, is the “flower of the field and the lily of the valleys,”<sup>3</sup> and the soul’s love is the hair that unites to itself this flower of flowers. Love is the most precious of all things, because it is the “bond of perfection,” as the Apostle says,<sup>4</sup> and perfection is union with God. The soul is, as it were, a sheaf of garlands, for it is the subject of this glory, no longer what it was before, but the very perfect flower of flowers in the perfection and beauty of all; for the thread of love binds so closely God and the soul, and so unites them, that it transforms them and makes them one by love; so that, though in essence different, yet in glory and appearance the soul seems God and God the soul. Such is this marvelous union, baffling all description.

2. We may form some conception of it from the love of David and Jonathan, whose “soul was knit with the soul of David.”<sup>5</sup> If the love of one man for another can be thus strong, so as to knit two souls together, what must that love of God be which can knit the soul of man to God the Bridegroom? God Himself is here the suitor Who in the omnipotence of His unfathomable love absorbs the soul with greater violence and efficacy than a torrent of fire a single drop of the morning dew which resolves itself into air. The hair, therefore, which accomplishes such a union must, of necessity, be most strong and subtle, seeing that it penetrates and binds together so effectually the soul and God. In the present stanza the soul declares the qualities of this hair.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 6:3

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 2:5

<sup>3</sup> Cant. 2:1

<sup>4</sup> Col. 3:14

<sup>5</sup> 1 Kings 18:1

## STANZA XXXI

*By that one hair  
You have observed fluttering on my neck,  
And on my neck regarded,  
You were captivated;  
And wounded by one of my eyes.*

THERE are three things mentioned here. The first is, that the love by which the virtues are bound together is nothing less than a strong love; for in truth it need be so in order to preserve them. The second is, that God is greatly taken by this hair of love, seeing it to be alone and strong. The third is, that God is deeply enamored of the soul, beholding the purity and integrity of its faith.

*“By that one hair You have observed fluttering  
on my neck.”*

2. The neck signifies that strength in which, it is said, fluttered the hair of love, strong love, which bound the virtues together. It is not sufficient for the preservation of virtues that love be alone, it must be also strong so that no contrary vice may anywhere destroy the perfection of the garland; for the virtues so are bound up together in the soul by the hair, that if the thread is once broken, all the virtues are lost; for where one virtue is, all are, and where one fails, all fail also. The hair is said to flutter on the neck, because its love of God, without any hindrance whatever, flutters strongly and lightly in the strength of the soul.

3. As the air causes hair to wave and flutter on the neck, so the breath of the Holy Spirit stirs the strong love that it may fly upwards to God; for without this divine wind, which excites the powers of the soul to the practice of divine love, all the virtues the soul may possess become ineffectual and fruitless. The Beloved observed the hair fluttering on the neck—that is, He considered it with particular attention and regard; because strong love is a great attraction for the eyes of God.

*“And on my neck regarded.”*

4. This shows us that God not only esteems this love, seeing it alone, but also loves it, seeing it strong; for to say that God regards is to say that He loves, and to say that He observes is to say that He esteems what He observes. The word “neck” is repeated in this line, because it, being strong, is the cause why God loves it so much. It is as if the soul said, “You have loved it, seeing it strong without weakness or fear, and without any other love, and flying upwards swiftly and fervently.”

5. Until now God had not looked upon this hair so as to be captivated by it, because He had not seen it alone, separate from the others, withdrawn from other loves, feelings, and affections, which hindered it from fluttering alone on the neck of strength. Afterwards, however, when mortifications and trials, temptations and penance had detached it, and made it strong, so that nothing whatever could break it, then God beholds it, and is taken by it, and binds the flowers of the



garlands with it; for it is now so strong that it can keep the virtues united together in the soul.

6. But what these temptations and trials are, how they come, and how far they reach, that the soul may attain to that strength of love in which God unites it to Himself, I have described in the “Dark Night,”<sup>1</sup> and in the explanation of the four stanzas<sup>2</sup> which begin with the words, “O living flame of love!” The soul having passed through these trials has reached a degree of love so high that it has merited the divine union.

*“You were captivated.”*

7. O joyful wonder! God captive to a hair. The reason of this capture so precious is that God was pleased to observe the fluttering of the hair on the soul’s neck; for where God regards He loves. If He in His grace and mercy had not first looked upon us and loved us,<sup>3</sup> as St. John says, and humbled Himself, He never could have been taken by the fluttering of the hair of our miserable love. His flight is not so low as that our love could lay hold of the divine bird, attract His attention, and fly so high with a strength worthy of His regard, if He had not first looked upon us. He, however, is taken by the fluttering of the hair; He makes it worthy and pleasing to Himself, and then is captivated by it. “You have seen it on my neck, You were captivated by it.” This renders it credible that a bird which flies low may capture the royal eagle in its flight, if the eagle should fly so low and be taken by it willingly.

*“And wounded by one of my eyes.”*

8. The eye is faith. The soul speaks of but one, and that this has wounded the Beloved. If the faith and trust of the soul in God were not one, without admixture of other considerations, God never could have been Wounded by love. Thus the eye that wounds, and the hair that binds, must be one. So strong is the love of the Bridegroom for the bride, because of her simple faith, that, if the hair of her love binds Him, the eye of her faith imprisons Him so closely as to wound Him through that most tender affection He bears her, which is to the bride a further progress in His love.

9. The Bridegroom Himself speaks in the Canticle of the hair and the eyes, saying to the bride, “You have wounded My heart, My sister, My bride; you have wounded My heart with one of your eyes, and with one hair of your neck.”<sup>4</sup> He says twice that His heart is wounded, that is, with the eye and the hair, and therefore the soul in this stanza speaks of them both, because they signify its union with God in the understanding and the will; for the understanding is subdued by faith, signified by the eye, and the will by love. Here the soul exults in this union, and gives thanks to the Bridegroom for it, it being His gift; accounting it a great matter that He has been pleased to requite its love, and to become captive to it. We may also observe here the joy, happiness, and delight of the soul with its prisoner, having been for a long time His prisoner, enamored of Him.

---

<sup>1</sup> ‘Dark Night,’ Bk. 1, ch. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Stanza ii. sect. 26 ff.

<sup>3</sup> 1 John 4:10

<sup>4</sup> Cant. 4:9

## NOTE

**GREAT** is the power and courage of love, for God is its prisoner. Blessed is the soul that loves, for it has made a captive of God Who obeys its good pleasure. Such is the nature of love that it makes those who love do what is asked of them, and, on the other hand, without love the utmost efforts will be fruitless, but one hair will bind those that love. The soul, knowing this, and conscious of blessings beyond its merits, in being raised up to so high a degree of love, through the rich endowments of graces and virtues, attributes all to the Beloved, saying:

## STANZA XXXII

*When You regarded me,  
Yours eyes imprinted in me Your grace:  
For this You loved me again,  
And thereby my eyes merited  
To adore what in You they saw.*

IT is the nature of perfect love to seek or accept nothing for itself, to attribute nothing to itself, but to refer all to the Beloved. If this is true of earthly love, how much more so of the love of God, the reason of which is so constraining. In the two foregoing stanzas the bride seemed to attribute something to herself; for she said that she would make garlands with her Beloved, and bind them with a hair of her head; that is a great work, and of no slight importance and worth: afterwards she said that she exulted in having captivated Him by a hair, and wounded Him with one of her eyes. All this seems as if she attributed great merits to herself. Now, however, she explains her meaning, and removes the wrong impression with great care and fear, lest any merit should be attributed to herself, and therefore less to God than His due, and less also than she desired. She now refers all to Him, and at the same time gives Him thanks, saying that the cause of His being the captive of the hair of her love, and of His being wounded by the eye of her faith, was His mercy in looking lovingly upon her, thereby rendering her lovely and pleasing in His sight; and that the loveliness and worth she received from Him merited His love, and made her worthy to adore her Beloved, and to bring forth good works worthy of His love and favor.

*“When You regarded me.”*

2. That is, with loving affection, for I have already said, that where God regards there He loves.

*“Yours eyes imprinted in me Your grace.”*

3. The eyes of the Bridegroom signify here His merciful divinity, which, mercifully inclined to the soul, imprints or infuses in it the love and grace by which He makes it beautiful, and so elevates it that He makes it the partaker of His divinity. When the soul sees to what height of dignity God has raised it, it says:

*“For this You loved me again.”*

4. To love again is to love much; it is more than simple love, it is a twofold love, and for two reasons. Here the soul explains the two motives of the Bridegroom's love; He not only loved it because captivated by the hair, but He loved it again, because He was wounded with one of its eyes. The reason why He loved it so deeply is that He would, when He looked upon it, give it the grace to please Him, endowing it with the hair of love, and animating with His charity the faith of the eye. And therefore the soul says:

*“For this You loved me again.”*

5. To say that God shows favor to the soul is to say that He renders it worthy and capable of His love. It is therefore as if the soul said, “Having shown Your favor to me, worthy pledges of Your love, You have therefore loved me again”; that is, “You have given me grace upon grace”; or, in the words of St. John, “grace for grace”;<sup>1</sup> grace for the grace He has given, that is more grace, for without grace we cannot merit His grace.

6. If we could clearly understand this truth, we must keep in mind that, as God loves nothing beside Himself, so loves He nothing more than Himself, because He loves all things with reference to Himself. Thus love is the final cause, and God loves nothing for what it is in itself. Consequently, when we say that God loves such a soul, we say, in effect, that He brings it in a manner to Himself, making it His equal, and thus it is He loves that soul in Himself with that very love with which He loves Himself. Every good work, therefore, of the soul in God is meritorious of God’s love, because the soul in His favor, thus exalted, merits God Himself in every act.

*“And thereby my eyes merited.”*

7. That is, “By the grace and favor which the eyes of Your compassion have wrought, when You looked upon me, rendering me pleasing in Your sight and worthy of Your regard.”

*“To adore what in You they saw.”*

8. That is: “The powers of my soul, O my Bridegroom, the eyes by which I can see You, although once fallen and miserable in the vileness of their mean occupations, have merited to look upon You.” To look upon God is to do good works in His grace. Thus the powers of the soul merit in adoring because they adore in the grace of God, in which every act is meritorious. Enlightened and exalted by grace, they adored what in Him they saw, and what they saw not before, because of their blindness and meanness. What, then, have they now seen? The greatness of His power, His overflowing sweetness, infinite goodness, love, and compassion, innumerable benefits received at His hands, as well now when so near Him as before when far away. The eyes of the soul now merit to adore, and by adoring merit, for they are beautiful and pleasing to the Bridegroom. Before they were unworthy, not only to adore or behold Him, but even to look upon Him at all: great indeed is the stupidity and blindness of a soul without the grace of God.

9. It is a melancholy thing to see how far a soul departs from its duty when it is not enlightened by the love of God. For being bound to acknowledge these and other innumerable favors which it has every moment received at His hands, temporal as well as spiritual, and to worship and serve Him unceasingly with all its faculties, it not only does not do so, but is unworthy even to think of Him; nor does it make any account of Him whatever. Such is the misery of those who are living, or rather who are dead, in sin.

#### NOTE

---

<sup>1</sup> John 1:16

FOR the better understanding of this and of what follows, we must keep in mind that the regard of God benefits the soul in four ways: it cleanses, adorns, enriches, and enlightens it, as the sun, when it shines, dries, warms, beautifies, and brightens the earth. When God has visited the soul in the three latter ways, whereby He renders it pleasing to Himself, He remembers its former uncleanness and sin no more: as it is written, "All the iniquities that he has wrought, I will not remember."<sup>1</sup>

God having once done away with our sin and uncleanness, He will look upon them no more; nor will He withhold His mercy because of them, for He never punishes twice for the same sin, according to the words of the prophet: "There shall not rise a double affliction."<sup>2</sup>

Still, though God forgets the sin He has once forgiven, we are not for that reason to forget it ourselves; for the Wise Man says, "Be not without fear about sin forgiven."<sup>3</sup> There are three reasons for this. We should always remember our sin, that we may not presume, that we may have a subject of perpetual thanksgiving, and because it serves to give us more confidence that we shall receive greater favors; for if, when we were in sin, God showed Himself to us so merciful and forgiving, how much greater mercies may we not hope for when we are clean from sin, and in His love?

The soul, therefore, calling to mind all the mercies it has received, and seeing itself united to the Bridegroom in such dignity, rejoices greatly with joy, thanksgiving, and love. In this it is helped exceedingly by the recollection of its former condition, which was so mean and filthy that it not only did not deserve that God should look upon it, but was unworthy that He should even utter its name, as He says by the mouth of the prophet David: "Nor will I be mindful of their names by My lips."<sup>4</sup> Thus the soul, seeing that there was, and that there can be, nothing in itself to attract the eyes of God, but that all comes from Him of pure grace and goodwill, attributes its misery to itself, and all the blessings it enjoys to the Beloved; and seeing further that because of these blessings it can merit now what it could not merit before, it becomes bold with God, and prays for the divine spiritual union, wherein its mercies are multiplied. This is the subject of the following stanza:

---

<sup>1</sup> Ezek. 18:22

<sup>2</sup> Nahum 1:9

<sup>3</sup> Ecclus. 5:5

<sup>4</sup> Ps. 15:4

## STANZA XXXIII

*Despise me not,  
For if I was swarthy once,  
You can regard me now;  
Since You have regarded me,  
Grace and beauty have You given me.*

THE soul now is becoming bold, and respects itself, because of the gifts and endowments which the Beloved has bestowed upon it. It recognizes that these things, while itself is worthless and underserving, are at least means of merit, and consequently it ventures to say to the Beloved, "Do not disregard me now, or despise me"; for if before it deserved contempt because of the filthiness of its sin, and the meanness of its nature, now that He has once looked upon it, and thereby adorned it with grace and beauty, He may well look upon it a second time and increase its grace and beauty. That He has once done so, when the soul did not deserve it, and had no attractions for Him, is reason enough why He should do so again and again.

*"Despise me not."*

2. The soul does not say this because it desires in any way to be esteemed—for contempt and insult are of great price, and occasions of joy to the soul that truly loves God—but because it acknowledges that in itself it merits nothing else, were it not for the gifts and graces it has received from God, as it appears from the words that follow.

*"For if I was swarthy once."*

3. "If, before You graciously looked upon me You found me in my filthiness, black with imperfections and sins, and naturally mean and vile,"

*"You can regard me now; since You have regarded me."*

4. After once looking upon me, and taking away my swarthy complexion, defiled by sin and disagreeable to look upon, when You rendered me lovely for the first time, You may well look upon me now—that is, now I may be looked on and deserve to be regarded, and thereby to receive further favors at Your hands. For Your eyes, when they first looked upon me, not only took away my swarthy complexion, but rendered me also worthy of Your regard; for in Your look of love,—

*"Grace and beauty have You given me."*

5. The two preceding lines are a commentary on the words of St. John, "grace for grace,"<sup>1</sup> for when God beholds a soul that is lovely in His eyes He is moved to bestow more grace upon it because He dwells well-pleased within it. Moses knew

---

<sup>1</sup> John 1:16

this, and prayed for further grace: he would, as it were, constrain God to grant it because he had already received so much “You have said: I know you by name, and you have found favor in My sight: if therefore I have found favor in Your sight, show me Your face, that I may know You, and may find grace before Yours eyes.”<sup>1</sup>

6. Now a soul which in the eyes of God is thus exalted in grace, honorable and lovely, is for that reason an object of His unutterable love. If He loved that soul before it was in a state of grace, for His own sake, He loves it now, when in a state of grace, not only for His own sake, but also for itself. Thus enamored of its beauty, through its affections and good works, now that it is never without them, He bestows upon it continually further grace and love, and the more honorable and exalted He renders that soul, the more is He captivated by it, and the greater His love for it.

7. God Himself sets this truth before us, saying to His people, by the mouth of the prophet, “since you became honorable in My eyes, and glorious, I have loved you.”<sup>2</sup> That is, “Since I have cast My eyes upon you, and thereby showed you favor, and made you glorious and honorable in My sight, you have merited other and further favors”; for to say that God loves, is to say that He multiplies His grace. The bride in the Canticle speaks to the same effect, saying, “I am black, but beautiful, O you daughters of Jerusalem.”<sup>3</sup> and the Church adds,<sup>4</sup> saying, “Therefore has the King loved me, and brought me into His secret chamber.” This is as much as saying: “O you souls who have no knowledge nor understanding of these favors, do not marvel that the heavenly King has shown such mercy to me as to plunge me in the depths of His love, for, though I am swarthy, He has so regarded me, after once looking upon me, that He could not be satisfied without betrothing me to Himself, and calling me into the inner chamber of His love.”

8. Who can measure the greatness of the soul’s exaltation when God is pleased with it? No language, no imagination is sufficient for this; for in truth God does this as God, to show that it is He who does it. The dealings of God with such a soul may in some degree be understood; but only in this way, namely, that He gives more to him who has more, and that His gifts are multiplied in proportion to the previous endowments of the soul. This is what He teaches us Himself in the Gospel, saying; “He that has to him shall be given, and he shall abound: but he that has not, from him shall be taken away even that which he has.”<sup>5</sup>

9. Thus the talent of that servant, not then in favor with his lord, was taken from him and given to another who had gained others, so that the latter might have all, together with the favor of his lord.<sup>6</sup> God heaps the noblest and the greatest favors of His house, which is the Church militant as well as the Church triumphant, upon him who is most His friend, ordaining it thus for His greater honor and glory, as a great light absorbs many little lights. This is the spiritual sense of

---

<sup>1</sup> Exod. 33:12,13

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 43:4

<sup>3</sup> Cant. 1:4

<sup>4</sup> Antiphon in Vesper B. M. V.

<sup>5</sup> Matt. 13:12

<sup>6</sup> Matt. 25:28

those words, already cited,<sup>1</sup> the prophet Isaiah addressed to the people of Israel: "I am the Lord your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior: I have given Egypt for your atonement and Seba for you. I will give men for you, and people for your life."<sup>2</sup>

10. Well may You then, O God, gaze upon and prize that soul which You regard, for You have made it precious by looking upon it, and given it graces which in Your sight are precious, and by which You are captivated. That soul, therefore, deserves that You should regard it not only once, but often, seeing that You have once looked upon it; for so is it written in the book of Esther by the Holy Spirit: "This honor is he worthy of, whom the king has a mind to honor."<sup>3</sup>

#### NOTE

THE gifts of love which the Bridegroom bestows on the soul in this state are inestimable; the praises and endearing expressions of divine love which pass so frequently between them are beyond all utterance. The soul is occupied in praising Him, and in giving Him thanks; and He in exalting, praising, and thanking the soul, as we see in the Cantic, where He thus speaks to the bride: "Behold, you are fair, O My love, behold, you are fair; your eyes are as those of doves." The bride replies: "Behold, you are fair, my Beloved, and comely."<sup>4</sup> These, and other like expressions, are addressed by them each to the other.

2. In the previous stanza the soul despised itself, and said it was swarthy and unclean, praising Him for His beauty and grace, Who, by looking upon the soul, rendered it gracious and beautiful. He, Whose way it is to exalt the humble, fixing His eyes upon the soul, as He was entreated to do, praises it in the following stanza. He does not call it swarthy, as the soul calls itself, but He addresses it as His white dove, praising it for its good dispositions, those of a dove and a turtle-dove.

---

<sup>1</sup> Sect. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 43:3

<sup>3</sup> Esth. 6:11

<sup>4</sup> Cant. 4:1, 6:3



## STANZA XXXIV

### THE BRIDEGROOM

*The little white dove  
Has returned to the ark with the bough;  
And now the turtle-dove  
Its desired mate  
On the green banks has found.*

IT is the Bridegroom Himself who now speaks. He celebrates the purity of the soul in its present state, the rich rewards it has gained, in having prepared itself, and labored to come to Him. He also speaks of its blessedness in having found the Bridegroom in this union, and of the fulfillment of all its desires, the delight and joy it has in Him now that all the trials of life and time are over.

*"The little white dove."*

2. He calls the soul, on account of its whiteness and purity—effects of the grace it has received at the hands of God—a dove, "the little white dove," for this is the term He applies to it in the Canticle, to mark its simplicity, its natural gentleness, and its loving contemplation. The dove is not only simple, and gentle without gall, but its eyes are also clear, full of love. The Bridegroom, therefore, to point out in it this character or loving contemplation, wherein it looks upon God, says of it that its eyes are those of a dove: "Your eyes are dove's eyes."<sup>1</sup>

*"Has returned to the ark with the bough."*

3. Here the Bridegroom compares the soul to the dove of Noah's ark, the going and returning of which is a figure of what befalls the soul. For as the dove went forth from the ark, and returned because it found no rest for its feet on account of the waters of the deluge, until the time when it returned with the olive branch in its mouth—a sign of the mercy of God in drying the waters which had covered the earth—so the soul went forth at its creation out of the ark of God's omnipotence, and having traversed the deluge of its sins and imperfections, and finding no rest for its desires, flew and returned on the air of the longings of its love to the ark of its Creator's bosom; but it only effected an entrance when God had dried the waters of its imperfections. Then it returned with the olive branch, that is, the victory over all things by His merciful compassion, to this blessed and perfect recollection in the bosom of the Beloved, not only triumphant over all its enemies, but also rewarded for its merits; for both the one and the other are symbolized by the olive bough. Thus the dove-soul returns to the ark of God not only white and pure as it went forth when He created it, but with the olive branch of reward and peace obtained by the conquest of itself.

*"And now the turtle dove its desired mate  
on the green banks has found."*

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 4:1

4. The Bridegroom calls the soul the turtle-dove, because when it is seeking after the Beloved it is like the turtle-dove when it cannot find its desired mate. It is said of the turtle-dove, when it cannot find its mate, that it will not sit on the green boughs, nor drink of the cool refreshing waters, nor retire to the shade, nor mingle with companions; but when it finds its mate then it does all this.

5. Such, too, is the condition of the soul, and necessarily, if it is to attain to union with the Bridegroom. The soul's love and anxiety must be such that it cannot rest on the green boughs of any joy, nor drink of the waters of this world's honor and glory, nor recreate itself with any temporal consolation, nor shelter itself in the shade of created help and protection: it must repose nowhere, it must avoid the society of all its inclinations, mourn in its loneliness, until it shall find the Bridegroom to its perfect contentment.

6. And because the soul, before it attained to this estate, sought the Beloved in great love, and was satisfied with nothing short of Him, the Bridegroom here speaks of the end of its labors, and the fulfillment of its desires, saying: "Now the turtle-dove its desired mate on the green banks has found." That is: Now the bride-soul sits on the green bough, rejoicing in her Beloved, drinks of the clear waters of the highest contemplation and of the wisdom of God; is refreshed by the consolations it finds in Him, and is also sheltered under the shadow of His favor and protection, which she had so earnestly desired. There is she deliciously and divinely comforted, refreshed and nourished, as she says in the, Cantic: "I sat down under His shadow Whom I desired, and His fruit was sweet to my palate."<sup>1</sup>

#### NOTE

THE Bridegroom proceeds to speak of the satisfaction which He derives from the happiness which the bride has found in that solitude wherein she desired to live—a stable peace and unchangeable good. For when the bride is confirmed in the tranquillity of her soul and solitary love of the Bridegroom, she reposes so sweetly in the love of God, and God also in her, that she requires no other means or masters to guide her in the way of God; for God Himself is now her light and guide, fulfilling in her what He promised by the mouth of Hosea, saying: "I will lead her into the wilderness, and I will speak to her heart."<sup>2</sup> That is, it is in solitude that He communicates Himself, and unites Himself, to the soul, for to speak to the heart is to satisfy the heart, and no heart can be satisfied with less than God. And so the Bridegroom Says:

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 2:3

<sup>2</sup> Hos. 2:14

## STANZA XXXV

*In solitude she lived,  
And in solitude built her nest;  
And in solitude, alone  
Has the Beloved guided her,  
In solitude also wounded with love.*

IN this stanza the Bridegroom is doing two things: one is, He is praising the solitude in which the soul once lived, for it was the means whereby it found the Beloved, and rejoiced in Him, away from all its former anxieties and troubles. For, as the soul abode in solitude, abandoning all created help and consolation, in order to obtain the fellowship and union of the Beloved, it deserved thereby possession of the peace of solitude in the Beloved, in Whom it reposes alone, undisturbed by any anxieties.

2. The second is this: the Bridegroom is saying that, inasmuch as the soul has desired to be alone, far away, for His sake, from all created things, He has been enamored of it because of its loneliness, has taken care of it, held it in His arms, fed it with all good things, and guided it to the deep things of God. He does not merely say that He is now the soul's guide, but that He is its only guide, without any intermediate help, either of angels or of men, either of forms or of figures; for the soul in this solitude has attained to true liberty of spirit, and is wholly detached from all subordinate means.

*"In solitude she lived."*

3. The turtle-dove, that is, the soul, lived in solitude before she found the Beloved in this state of union; for the soul that longs after God derives no consolation from any other companionship,—yes, until it finds Him everything does but increase its solitude.

*"And in solitude built her nest."*

4. The previous solitude of the soul was its voluntary privation of all the comforts of this world, for the sake of the Bridegroom—as in the instance of the turtledove—its striving after perfection, and acquiring that perfect solitude wherein it attains to union with the Word, and in consequence to complete refreshment and repose. This is what is meant by "nest"; and the words of the stanza may be thus explained: "In that solitude, wherein the bride formerly lived, tried by afflictions and troubles, because she was not perfect, there, in that solitude, has she found refreshment and rest, because she has found perfect rest in God." This, too, is the spiritual sense of these words of the Psalmist: "The sparrow has found herself a house, and the turtle a nest for herself, where she may lay her young ones;<sup>1</sup> that is, a sure stay in God, in Whom all the desires and powers of the soul are satisfied."

*"And in solitude."*

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 83:4

5. In the solitude of perfect detachment from all things, wherein it lives alone with God—there He guides it, moves it, and elevates it to divine things. He guides the understanding in the perception of divine things, because it is now detached from all strange and contrary knowledge, and is alone. He moves the will freely to love Himself, because it is now alone, disencumbered from all other affections. He fills the memory with divine knowledge, because that also is now alone, emptied of all imaginations and fancies. For the instant the soul clears and empties its faculties of all earthly objects, and from attachments to higher things, keeping them in solitude, God immediately fills them with the invisible and divine; it being God Himself Who guides it in this solitude. St. Paul says of the perfect, that they “are led by the Spirit of God,”<sup>1</sup> and that is the same as saying “In solitude has He guided her.”

*“Alone has the Beloved guided her.”*

6. That is, the Beloved not only guides the soul in its solitude, but it is He alone Who works in it directly and immediately. It is of the nature of the soul’s union with God in the spiritual marriage that God works directly, and communicates Himself immediately, not by the ministry of angels or by the help of natural capacities. For the exterior and interior senses, all created things, and even the soul itself, contribute very little towards the reception of those great supernatural favors which God bestows in this state; indeed, inasmuch as they do not fall within the cognizance of natural efforts, ability and application, God effects them alone.

7. The reason is, that He finds the soul alone in its solitude, and therefore will not give it another companion, nor will He entrust His work to any other than Himself.

8. There is a certain fitness in this; for the soul having abandoned all things, and passed through all the ordinary means, rising above them to God, God Himself becomes the guide, and the way to Himself. The soul in solitude, detached from all things, having now ascended above all things, nothing now can profit or help it to ascend higher except the Bridegroom Word Himself, Who, because enamored of the bride, will Himself alone bestow these graces on the soul. And so He says:

*“In solitude also wounded with love.”*

9. That is, the love of the bride; for the Bridegroom not only loves greatly the solitude of the soul, but is also wounded with love of her, because the soul would abide in solitude and detachment, on account of its being itself wounded with love of Him. He will not, therefore, leave it alone; for being wounded with love because of the soul’s solitude on His account, and seeing that nothing else can satisfy it, He comes Himself to be alone its guide, drawing it to, and absorbing it in, Himself. But He would not have done so if He had not found it in this spiritual solitude.

#### NOTE

---

<sup>1</sup> Rom. 8:14

IT is a strange characteristic of persons in love that they take a much greater pleasure in their loneliness than in the company of others. For if they meet together in the presence of others with whom they need have no intercourse, and from whom they have nothing to conceal, and if those others neither address them nor interfere with them, yet the very fact of their presence is sufficient to rob the lovers of all pleasure in their meeting. The cause of this lies in the fact that love is the union of two persons, who will not communicate with each other if they are not alone. And now the soul, having reached the summit of perfection, and liberty of spirit in God, all the resistance and contradictions of the flesh being subdued, has no other occupation or employment than indulgence in the joys of its intimate love of the Bridegroom. It is written of holy Tobit, after the trials of his life were over, that God restored his sight, and that "the rest of his life was in joy."<sup>1</sup> So is it with the perfect soul, it rejoices in the blessings that surround it.

2. The prophet Isaiah says of the soul which, having been tried in the works of perfection has arrived at the goal desired: "Your light shall arise up in darkness, and your darkness shall be as the noonday. And the Lord will give you rest always, and will fill your soul with brightness, and deliver your bones, and you shall be as a watered garden and as a fountain of water whose waters shall not fail. And the deserts of the world shall be built in you: you shall raise up the foundations of generation and generation; and you shall be called the builder of the hedges, turning the paths into rest. If you turn away your foot from the Sabbath, from doing your will in My holy day, and call the Sabbath delicate, and the Holy of our Lord glorious, and glorify Him while you do not your own ways, and your will be not found, to speak a word: then shall you be delighted in the Lord, and I will lift you up above the heights of the earth, and will feed you with the inheritance of Jacob your father,"<sup>2</sup> Who is God Himself. The soul, therefore, has nothing else to do now but to rejoice in the delights of this pasture, and one thing only to desire—the perfect fruition of it in everlasting life. Thus, in the next and the following stanzas it implores the Beloved to admit it into this beatific pasture in the clear vision of God, and says:

---

<sup>1</sup> Tob. 14:4

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 58:10-14

## STANZA XXXVI

### THE BRIDE

*Let us rejoice, O my Beloved,  
Let us go forth to see ourselves in Your beauty,  
To the mountain and the hill,  
Where the pure water flows:  
Let us enter into the heart of the thicket.*

THE perfect union of love between itself and God being now effected, the soul longs to occupy itself with those things that belong to love. It is the soul which is now speaking, making three petitions to the Beloved. In the first place, it asks for the joy and sweetness of love, saying, "Let us rejoice." In the second place, it prays to be made like Him, saying, "Let us go forth to see ourselves in Your beauty." In the third place, it begs to be admitted to the knowledge of His secrets, saying, "Let us enter into the heart of the thicket."

*"Let us rejoice, O my Beloved."*

2. That is, in the sweetness of our love; not only in that sweetness of ordinary union, but also in that which flows from active and affective love, whether in the will by an act of affection, or outwardly in good works which tend to the service of the Beloved. For love, as I have said, where it is firmly rooted, ever runs after those joys and delights which are the acts of exterior and interior love. All this the soul does that it may be made like to the Beloved.

*"Let us go forth to see ourselves in Your beauty."*

3. "Let us so act, that, by the practice of this love, we may come to see ourselves in Your beauty in everlasting life." That is: "Let me be so transformed in Your beauty, that, being alike in beauty, we may see ourselves both in Your beauty; having Your beauty, so that, one beholding the other, each may see his own beauty in the other, the beauty of both being Yours only, and mine absorbed in it. And thus I shall see You in Your beauty, and myself in Your beauty, and You shall see me in Your beauty; and I shall see myself in You in Your beauty, and You Yourself in me in Your beauty; so shall I seem to be Yourself in Your beauty, and You myself in Your beauty; my beauty shall be Yours, Yours shall be mine, and I shall be You in it, and You myself in Your own beauty; for Your beauty will be my beauty, and so we shall see, each the other, in Your beauty."

4. This is the adoption of the sons of God, who may truly say what the Son Himself says to the Eternal Father: "All My things are Yours, and Yours are Mine,"<sup>1</sup> He by essence, being the Son of God by nature, we by participation, being sons by adoption. This He says not for Himself only, Who is the Head, but for the whole mystical body, which is the Church. For the Church will share in the very beauty of the Bridegroom in the day of her triumph, when she shall see God face to face.

---

<sup>1</sup> John 17:10

And this is the vision which the soul prays that the Bridegroom and itself may go in His beauty to see.

*“To the mountain and the hill.”*

5. That is, to the morning and essential knowledge of God,<sup>1</sup> which is knowledge in the Divine Word, Who, because He is so high, is here signified by “the mountain.” Thus Isaiah says, calling upon men to know the Son of God: “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of our Lord”;<sup>2</sup> and before: “In the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be prepared.”<sup>3</sup>

*“And to the hill.”*

6. That is, to the evening knowledge of God, to the knowledge of Him in His creatures, in His works, and in His marvelous laws. This is signified by the expression “hill,” because it is a kind of knowledge lower than the other. The soul prays for both when it says “to the mountain and the hill.”

7. When the soul says, “Let us go forth to see ourselves in Your beauty to the mountain,” its meaning is, “Transform me, and make me like the beauty of the Divine Wisdom, the Word, the Son of God.” When it says “to the hill,” the meaning is, “Instruct me in the beauty of this lower knowledge, which is manifest in Your creatures and mysterious works.” This also is the beauty of the Son of God, with which the soul desires to shine.

8. But the soul cannot see itself in the beauty of God if it is not transformed in His wisdom, wherein all things are seen and possessed, whether in heaven or in earth. It was to this mountain and to this hill the bride longed to come when she said, “I will go to the mountain of myrrh, and to the hill of frankincense.”<sup>4</sup> The mountain of myrrh is the clear vision of God, and the hill of frankincense the knowledge of Him in His works, for the myrrh on the mountain is of a higher order than the incense on the hill.

*“Where the pure water flows.”*

9. This is the wisdom and knowledge of God, which cleanse the understanding, and detach it from all accidents and fancies, and which clear it of the mist of ignorance. The soul is ever influenced by this desire of perfectly and clearly understanding the divine verities, and the more it loves the more it desires to penetrate them, and hence the third petition which it makes:

*“Let us enter into the heart of the thicket;”*

10. Into the depths of God’s marvelous works and profound judgments. Such is

---

<sup>1</sup> St. Augustine, ‘De Genesi ad Litt.’ iv., xxiv. (and elsewhere) and the scholastics (St. Thomas, ‘S. Th.’ I. lviii. 7) distinguish between the ‘morning knowledge’ whereby angels and saints know created things by seeing the Divine Word, and ‘evening knowledge’ where they derive their knowledge from the created things themselves.

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 2:3

<sup>3</sup> Isa. 2:2

<sup>4</sup> Cant. 4:6

their multitude and variety, that they may be called a thicket. They are so full of wisdom and mystery, that we may not only call them a thicket, but we may even apply to them the words of David: "The mountain of God is a rich mountain, a mountain curdled as cheese, a rich mountain."<sup>1</sup> The thicket of the wisdom and knowledge of God is so deep, and so immense, that the soul, however much it knows of it, can always penetrate further within it, because it is so immense and so incomprehensible. "O the depth," cries out the Apostle, "of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!"<sup>2</sup>

11. But the soul longs to enter this thicket and incomprehensibility of His judgments, for it is moved by that longing for a deeper knowledge of them. That knowledge is an inestimable delight, transcending all understanding. David, speaking of the sweetness of them, says: "The judgments of our Lord are true, justified in themselves, to be desired above gold and many precious stones, and sweeter than honey and the honey-comb. For Your servant keeps them."<sup>3</sup> The soul therefore earnestly longs to be engulfed in His judgments, and to have a deeper knowledge of them, and for that end would esteem it a joy and great consolation to endure all sufferings and afflictions in the world, and whatever else might help it to that end, however hard and painful it might be; it would gladly pass through the agonies of death to enter deeper into God.

12. Hence, also, the thicket, which the soul desires to enter, may be fittingly understood as signifying the great and many trials and tribulations which the soul longs for, because suffering is most sweet and most profitable to it, inasmuch as it is the way by which it enters more and more into the thicket of the delicious wisdom of God. The most pure suffering leads to the most pure and the deepest knowledge, and consequently to the purest and highest joy, for that is the issue of the deepest knowledge. Thus, the soul, not satisfied with ordinary suffering, says, "Let us enter into the heart of the thicket," even the anguish of death, that I may see God.

13. Job, desiring to suffer that he might see God, thus speaks "Who will grant that my request may come, and that God may give me what I look for? And that He that has begun may destroy me, that He may let loose His hand and cut me off? And that this may be my comfort, that afflicting me with sorrow, He spare not."<sup>4</sup> O that men would understand how impossible it is to enter the thicket, the manifold riches of the wisdom of God, without entering into the thicket of manifold suffering making it the desire and consolation of the soul; and how that the soul which really longs for the divine wisdom longs first of all for the sufferings of the Cross, that it may enter in.

14. For this cause it was that St. Paul admonished the Ephesians not to faint in their tribulations, but to take courage: "That being rooted and founded in charity, you may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and height, and depth; to know also the charity of Christ, which

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 67:16

<sup>2</sup> Rom. 11:33

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 18:10-12

<sup>4</sup> Job 6:8-10



surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled to all the fullness of God.”<sup>1</sup> The gate by which we enter into the riches of the knowledge of God is the Cross; and that gate is narrow. They who desire to enter in that way are few, while those who desire the joys that come by it are many.

#### NOTE

ONE of the principal reasons why the soul desires to be released and to be with Christ is that it may see Him face to face, and penetrate to the depths of His ways and the eternal mysteries of His incarnation, which is not the least part of its blessedness; for in the Gospel of St. John He, addressing the Father, said: “Now this is eternal life: that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ Whom You have sent.”<sup>2</sup> As the first act of a person who has taken a long journey is to see and converse with him whom he was in search of, so the first thing which the soul desires, when it has attained to the beatific vision, is to know and enjoy the deep secrets and mysteries of the incarnation and the ancient ways of God depending on them. Thus the soul, having said that it longed to see itself in the beauty of God, sings as in the following stanza:

---

<sup>1</sup> Eph. 3:17-19

<sup>2</sup> John 17:3

## STANZA XXXVII

*We shall go at once  
To the deep caverns of the rock  
Which are all secret;  
There we shall enter in,  
And taste of the new wine of the pomegranate.*

ONE of the reasons which most influence the soul to desire to enter into the “thicket” of the wisdom of God, and to have a more intimate knowledge of the beauty of the divine wisdom, is, as I have said, that it may unite the understanding with God in the knowledge of the mysteries of the Incarnation, as of all His works the highest and most full of sweetness, and the most delicious knowledge. And here the bride therefore says, that after she has entered in within the divine wisdom—that is, the spiritual marriage, which is now and will be in glory, seeing God face to face—her soul united with the divine wisdom, the Son of God, she will then understand the deep mysteries of God and Man, which are the highest wisdom hidden in God. They, that is, the bride and the Bridegroom, will enter in—the soul engulfed and absorbed—and both together will have the fruition of the joy which springs from the knowledge of mysteries, and attributes and power of God which are revealed in those mysteries, such as His justice, His mercy, wisdom, power, and love.

*“We shall go at once to the deep caverns of the rock.”*

2. “This rock is Christ,” as we learn from St. Paul.<sup>1</sup> The deep caverns of the rock are the deep mysteries of the wisdom of God in Christ, in the hypostatical union of the human nature with the Divine Word, and in the correspondence with it of the union of man with God, and in the agreement of God’s justice and mercy in the salvation of mankind, in the manifestation of His judgments. And because His judgments are so high and so deep, they are here fittingly called “deep caverns”; deep because of the depth of His mysteries, and caverns because of the depth of His wisdom in them. For as caverns are deep, with many windings, so each mystery of Christ is of deepest wisdom, and has many windings of His secret judgments of predestination and foreknowledge with respect to men.

3. Notwithstanding the marvelous mysteries which holy doctors have discovered, and holy souls have understood in this life, many more remain behind. There are in Christ great depths to be fathomed, for He is a rich mine, with many recesses full of treasures, and however deeply we may descend we shall never reach the end, for in every recess new veins of new treasures abound in all directions: “In Whom,” according to the Apostle, “are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”<sup>2</sup> But the soul cannot reach these hidden treasures unless it first passes through the thicket of interior and exterior suffering: for even such knowledge of the mysteries of Christ as is possible in this life cannot be had without great sufferings, and without many intellectual and moral gifts, and

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 10:4

<sup>2</sup> Col. 2:3

without previous spiritual exercises; for all these gifts are far inferior to this knowledge of the mysteries of Christ, being only a preparation for it.

4. Thus God said to Moses, when he asked to see His glory, “Man shall not see Me and live.” God, however, said that He would show him all that could be revealed in this life; and so He set Moses “in a hole of the rock,” which is Christ, where he might see His “back parts”;<sup>1</sup> that is, He made him understand the mysteries of the Sacred Humanity.

5. The soul longs to enter in earnest into these caverns of Christ, that it may be absorbed, transformed, and inebriated in the love and knowledge of His mysteries, hiding itself in the bosom of the Beloved. It is into these caverns that He invites the bride, in the Canticle, to enter, saying: “Arise, My love, My beautiful one, and come; My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall.”<sup>2</sup> These clefts of the rock are the caverns of which we are here speaking, and to which the bride refers, saying:

*“And there we shall enter in.”*

6. That is, in the knowledge of the divine mysteries. The bride does not say “I will enter” alone, which seems the most fitting—seeing that the Bridegroom has no need to enter in again—but “we will enter,” that is, the Bridegroom and the bride, to show that this is not the work of the bride, but of the Bridegroom with her. Moreover, inasmuch as God and the soul are now united in the state of spiritual marriage, the soul does nothing of itself without God. To say “we will enter,” is as much as to say, “there shall we transform ourselves”—that is, “I shall be transformed in You through the love of Your divine and sweet judgments”: for in the knowledge of the predestination of the just and in the foresight of the wicked, wherein the Father prevented the just in the benedictions of His sweetness in Jesus Christ His Son, the soul is transformed in a most exalted and perfect way in the love of God according to this knowledge, giving thanks to the Father, and loving Him again and again with great sweetness and delight, for the sake of Jesus Christ His Son. This the soul does in union with Christ and together with Him. The delight flowing from this act of praise is ineffably sweet, and the soul speaks of it in the words that follow:

*“And taste of the new wine of the pomegranates.”*

7. The pomegranates here are the mysteries of Christ and the judgments of the wisdom of God; His power and attributes, the knowledge of which we have from these mysteries; and they are infinite. For as pomegranates have many grains in their round orb, so in each one of the attributes and judgments and power of God is a multitude of admirable arrangements and marvelous works contained within the sphere of power and mystery, appertaining to those works. Consider the round form of the pomegranate; for each pomegranate signifies some one power and attribute of God, which power or attribute is God Himself, symbolized here by the circular figure, which has neither beginning nor end. It was in the contemplation of the judgments and mysteries of the wisdom of God, which are

---

<sup>1</sup> Exod. 33:20-23

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 2:13,14

infinite, that the bride said, “His belly is of ivory set with sapphires.”<sup>1</sup> The sapphires are the mysteries and judgments of the divine Wisdom, which is here signified by the “belly”—the sapphire being a precious stone of the color of the heavens when clear and serene.

8. The wine of the pomegranates which the bride says that she and the Bridegroom will taste is the fruition and joy of the love of God which overflows the soul in the understanding and knowledge of His mysteries. For as the many grains of the pomegranate pressed together give forth but one wine, so all the marvels and magnificence of God, infused into the soul, issue in but one fruition and joy of love, which is the drink of the Holy Spirit, and which the soul offers at once to God the Word, its Bridegroom, with great tenderness of love.

9. This divine drink the bride promised to the Bridegroom if He would lead her into this deep knowledge: “There You shall teach me,” says the bride, “and I will give You a cup of spiced wine, and new wine of my pomegranates.”<sup>2</sup> The soul calls them “my pomegranates,” though they are God’s Who had given them to it, and the soul offers them to God as if they were its own, saying, “We will taste of the wine of the pomegranates”; for when He states it He gives it to the soul to taste, and when the soul tastes it, the soul gives it back to Him, and thus it is that both taste it together.

#### NOTE

IN the two previous stanzas the bride sung of those good things which the Bridegroom is to give her in everlasting bliss, namely, her transformation in the beauty of created and uncreated wisdom, and also in the beauty of the union of the Word with flesh, wherein she shall behold His face as well as His back. Accordingly two things are set before us in the following stanza. The first is the way in which the soul tastes of the divine wine of the pomegranates; the second is the soul’s putting before the Bridegroom the glory of its predestination. And though these two things are spoken of separately, one after the other, they are both involved in the one essential glory of the soul.

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 5:14

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 8:2

## STANZA XXXVIII

*There you will show me  
That which my soul desired;  
And there You will give at once,  
O You, my life,  
That which You gave me the other day.*

THE reason why the soul longed to enter the caverns was that it might attain to the consummation of the love of God, the object of its continual desires; that is, that it might love God with the pureness and perfection with which He has loved it, so that it might thereby requite His love. Hence in the present stanza the bride says to the Bridegroom that He will there show her what she had always aimed at in all her actions, namely, that He would show her how to love Him perfectly, as He has loved her. And, secondly, that He will give her that essential glory for which He has predestined her from the day of His eternity.

*“There You will show me  
That which my soul desired.”*

2. That which the soul aims at is equality in love with God, the object of its natural and supernatural desire. He who loves cannot be satisfied if he does not feel that he loves as much as he is loved. And when the soul sees that in the transformation in God, such as is possible in this life, notwithstanding the immensity of its love, it cannot equal the perfection of that love with which God loves it, it desires the clear transformation of glory in which it shall equal the perfection of love with which it is itself beloved of God; it desires, I say, the clear transformation of glory in which it shall equal His love.

3. For though in this high state, which the soul reaches on earth, there is a real union of the will, yet it cannot reach that perfection and strength of love which it will possess in the union of glory; seeing that then, according to the Apostle, the soul will know God as it is known of Him: “Then I shall know even as I am known.”<sup>1</sup> That is, “I shall then love God even as I am loved by Him.” For as the understanding of the soul will then be the understanding of God, and its will the will of God, so its love will also be His love. Though in heaven the will of the soul is not destroyed, it is so intimately united with the power of the will of God, Who loves it, that it loves Him as strongly and as perfectly as it is loved of Him; both wills being united in one sole will and one sole love of God.

4. Thus the soul loves God with the will and strength of God Himself, being made one with that very strength of love with which itself is loved of God. This strength is of the Holy Spirit, in Whom the soul is there transformed. He is given to the soul to strengthen its love; ministering to it, and supplying in it, because of its transformation in glory, that which is defective in it. In the perfect transformation, also, of the state of spiritual marriage, such as is possible on earth, in which the soul is all clothed in grace, the soul loves in a certain way in

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 13:12

the Holy Spirit, Who is given to it in that transformation.

5. We are to observe here that the bride does not say, “There will You give me Your love,” though that is true—for that means only that God will love her—but that He will there show her how she is to love Him with that perfection at which she aims, because there in giving her His love He will at the same time show her how to love Him as He loves her. For God not only teaches the soul to love Himself purely, with a disinterested love, as He has loved us, but He also enables it to love Him with that strength with which He loves the soul, transforming it in His love, wherein He bestows upon it His own power, so that it may love Him. It is as if He put an instrument in its hand, taught it the use thereof, and played upon it together with the soul. This is showing the soul how it is to love, and at the same time endowing it with the capacity of loving.

6. The soul is not satisfied until it reaches this point, neither would it be satisfied even in heaven, unless it felt, as St. Thomas teaches,<sup>1</sup> that it loved God as much as it is loved of Him. And as I said of the state of spiritual marriage of which I am speaking, there is now at this time, though it cannot be that perfect love in glory, a certain vivid vision and likeness of that perfection, which is wholly indescribable.

*“And there You will give me at once, O You my life,  
that which You gave me the other day.”*

7. What He will give is the essential glory which consists in the vision of God. Before proceeding further it is requisite to solve a question which arises here, namely, Why is it, seeing that essential glory consists in the vision of God, and not in loving Him, the soul says that its longing is for His love, and not for the essential glory? Why is it that the soul begins the stanza with referring to His love, and then introduces the subject of the essential glory afterwards, as if it were something of less importance?

8. There are two reasons for this. The first is this: As the whole aim of the soul is love, the seat of which is in the will, the property of which is to give and not to receive—the property of the understanding, the subject of essential glory, being to receive and not to give—to the soul inebriated with love the first consideration is not the essential glory which God will bestow upon it, but the entire surrender of itself to Him in true love, without any regard to its own advantage.

9. The second reason is that the second object is included in the first, and has been taken for granted in the previous stanzas, it being impossible to attain to the perfect love of God without the perfect vision of Him. The question is solved by the first reason, for the soul renders to God by love that which is His due, but with the understanding it receives from Him and does not give.

10. I now resume the explanation of the stanza, and inquire what day is meant by the “other day,” and what is it that God then gave the soul, and what that is which it prays to receive afterwards in glory? By “other day” is meant the day of the eternity of God, which is other than the day of time. In that day of eternity God predestined the soul to glory, and determined the degree of glory which He would give it and freely gave from the beginning before He created it. This now, in a

---

<sup>1</sup> ‘Opusc de Beatitudine,’ ch. 2.

manner, so truly belongs to the soul that no event or accident, high or low, can ever take it away, for the soul will enjoy for ever that for which God had predestined it from all eternity.

11. This is that which He gave it “the other day”; that which the soul longs now to possess visibly in glory. And what is that which He gave it? That what “eye has not seen nor ear has heard, neither has it ascended into the heart of man.”<sup>1</sup> “The eye has not seen,” says Isaiah, “O God, beside You, what things You have prepared for them that expect You.”<sup>2</sup> The soul has no word to describe it, so it says “what.” It is in truth the vision of God, and as there is no expression by which we can explain what it is to see God, the soul says only “that which You gave me.”

12. But that I may not leave the subject without saying something further concerning it, I will repeat what Christ has said of it in the Revelation of St. John, in many terms, phrases, and comparisons, because a single word once uttered cannot describe it, for there is much still unsaid, notwithstanding all that Christ has spoken at seven different times. “To him that overcomes,” says He, “I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of My God.”<sup>3</sup> But as this does not perfectly describe it, He says again: “Be faithful to death; and I will give you the crown of life.”<sup>4</sup>

13. This also is insufficient, and so He speaks again more obscurely, but explaining it more: “To him that overcomes I will give the hidden manna, and will give him a white counter, and on the counter a new name written which no man knows but he that receives it.”<sup>5</sup> And as even this is still insufficient, the Son of God speaks of great power and joy, saying: “He that shall overcome and keep My works to the end, I will give him power over the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, and as a vessel of the potter they shall be broken: as I also have received of My Father. And I will give him the morning star.”<sup>6</sup> Not satisfied with these words, He adds: “He that shall overcome shall thus be vested in white garments, and I will not put his name out of the book of life, and I will confess his name before My Father.”<sup>7</sup>

14. Still, all this falls short. He speaks of it in words of unutterable majesty and grandeur: “He that shall overcome I will make Him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more; and I will write upon him the name of My God, and the name of the city of My God, the new Jerusalem which descends out of heaven from My God, and My new name.”<sup>8</sup> The seventh time He says: “He that shall overcome I will give to him to sit with Me in My throne: as I also have overcome, and sat with My Father in His throne. He that has an ear let him hear what the Spirit says to the Churches.”<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. 2:9

<sup>2</sup> Isa. 64:4

<sup>3</sup> Rev. 2:7

<sup>4</sup> Rev. 2:10

<sup>5</sup> Rev. 2:17

<sup>6</sup> Rev. 2:26-28

<sup>7</sup> Rev. 3:5

<sup>8</sup> Rev. 3:12

<sup>9</sup> Rev. 3:21,22

15. These are the words of the Son of God; all of which tend to describe that which was given to the soul. The words correspond most accurately with it, but still they do not explain it, because it involves infinite good. The noblest expressions befit it, but none of them reach it, no, not all together.

16. Let us now see whether David has said anything of it. In one of the Psalms he says, "O how great is the multitude of your sweetness, O Lord, which You have hidden for them that fear You."<sup>1</sup> In another place he calls it a "torrent of pleasure," saying, "You shall make them drink of the torrent of Your pleasure."<sup>2</sup> And as he did not consider this enough, he says again, "You have prevented him with blessings of sweetness."<sup>3</sup> The expression that rightly fits this "that" of the soul, namely, its predestined bliss, cannot be found. Let us, therefore, rest satisfied with what the soul has used in reference to it, and explain the words as follows:

*"That which You gave me."*

17. That is, "That weight of glory to which You predestined me, O my Bridegroom, in the day of Your eternity, when it was Your good pleasure to decree my creation, You will then give me in my day of my betrothal and of my nuptials, in my day of the joy of my heart, when, released from the burden of the flesh, led into the deep caverns of Your bridal chamber and gloriously transformed in You, we drink the wine of the sweet pomegranates."

#### NOTE

BUT inasmuch as the soul, in the state of spiritual marriage, of which I am now speaking, cannot but know something of this "that," seeing that because of its transformation in God something of it must be experienced by it, it will not omit to say something on the subject, the pledges and signs of which it is conscious of in itself, as it is written: "Who can withhold the words He has conceived?"<sup>4</sup> Hence in the following stanza the soul says something of the fruition which it shall have in the beatific vision, explaining so far as it is possible the nature and the manner of it.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 30:20

<sup>2</sup> Ps. 35:9

<sup>3</sup> Ps. 20:4

<sup>4</sup> Job 4:2



## STANZA XXXIX

*The breathing of the air,  
The song of the sweet nightingale,  
The grove and its beauty  
In the serene night,  
With the flame that consumes, and gives no pain.*

THE soul refers here, under five different expressions, to that which the Bridegroom is to give it in the beatific transformation. 1. The aspiration of the Holy Spirit of God after it, and its own aspiration after God. 2. Joyous praise of God in the fruition of Him. 3. The knowledge of creatures and the order of them. 4. The pure and clear contemplation of the divine essence. 5. Perfect transformation in the infinite love of God.

*“The breathing of the air.”*

2. This is a certain faculty which God will there give the soul in the communication of the Holy Spirit, Who, like one breathing, raises the soul by His divine aspiration, informs it, strengthens it, so that it too may breathe in God with the same aspiration of love which the Father breathes with the Son, and the Son with the Father, which is the Holy Spirit Himself, Who is breathed into the soul in the Father and the Son in that transformation so as to unite it to Himself; for the transformation will not be true and perfect if the soul is not transformed in the Three Persons of the Most Holy Trinity in a clear manifest degree. This breathing of the Holy Spirit in the soul, whereby God transforms it in Himself, is to the soul a joy so deep, so exquisite, and so grand that no mortal tongue can describe it, no human understanding, as such, conceive it in any degree; for even that which passes in the soul with respect to the communication which takes place in its transformation wrought in this life cannot be described, because the soul united with God and transformed in Him breathes in God that very divine aspiration which God breathes Himself in the soul when it is transformed in Him.

3. In the transformation which takes place in this life, this breathing of God in the soul, and of the soul in God, is of most frequent occurrence, and the source of the most exquisite delight of love to the soul, but not however in the clear and manifest degree which it will have in the life to come. This, in my opinion, is what St. Paul referred to when he said: “Because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father.”<sup>1</sup> The blessed in the life to come, and the perfect in this, thus experience it.

4. Nor is it to be thought possible that the soul should be capable of so great a thing as that it should breathe in God as God in it, in the way of participation. For granting that God has bestowed upon it so great a favor as to unite it to the most Holy Trinity, whereby it becomes like God, and God by participation, is it altogether incredible that it should exercise the faculties of its understanding, perform its acts of knowledge and of love, or, to speak more accurately, should

---

<sup>1</sup> Gal. 4:6

have it all done in the Holy Trinity together with It, as the Holy Trinity itself? This, however, takes place by communication and participation, God Himself effecting it in the soul, for this is “to be transformed in the Three Persons” in power, wisdom, and love, and herein it is that the soul becomes like God, Who, that it might come to this, created it to His own image and likeness.

5. How this can be so cannot be explained in any other way than by showing how the Son of God has raised us to so high a state, and merited for us the “power to be made the sons of God.”<sup>1</sup> He prayed to the Father, saying: “Father, I will that where I am they also whom You have given Me may be with Me, that they may see My glory which You have given Me.”<sup>2</sup> That is, “that they may do by participation in Us what I do naturally, namely, breathe the Holy Spirit.” He says also: “Not for them only do I pray, but for them also who through their word shall believe in Me; that they all may be one, as You, Father, in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us: that the world may believe that You have sent Me. And the glory which You have given Me, I have given to them: that they may be one as We also are one. I in them and You in Me, that they may be made perfect in one, and the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have also loved Me,”<sup>3</sup>—that is, in bestowing upon them that love which He bestows upon the Son, though not naturally as upon Him, but in the way I speak of, in the union and transformation of love.

6. We are not to suppose from this that our Lord prayed that the saints might become one in essence and nature, as the Father and the Son are; but that they might become one in the union of love as the Father and the Son are one in the oneness of love. Souls have by participation that very God which the Son has by nature, and are therefore really gods by participation like unto God and of His society.

7. St. Peter speaks of this as follows: “Grace to you and peace be accomplished in the knowledge of God, and Christ Jesus our Lord; as all things of His divine power, which pertain to life and godliness, are given us by the knowledge of Him Who has called us by His own proper glory and virtue, by Whom He has given us most great and precious promises: that by these you may be made partakers of the divine nature.”<sup>4</sup> Thus far St. Peter, who clearly teaches that the soul will be a partaker of God Himself, and will do, together with Him, the work of the Most Holy Trinity, because of the substantial union between the soul and God. And though this union is perfect only in the life to come, yet even in this, in the state of perfection, which the soul is said now to have attained, some anticipation of its sweetness is given it, in the way I am speaking of, though in a manner wholly ineffable.

8. O souls created for this and called to this, what are you doing? What are your occupations? Your aim is meanness, and your enjoyments misery. Oh, wretched blindness of the children of Adam, blind to so great a light, and deaf to so clear a voice; you do not see that, while seeking after greatness and glory, you are miserable and contemptible, ignorant, and unworthy of blessings so great. I now

---

<sup>1</sup> John 1:12

<sup>2</sup> John 17:24

<sup>3</sup> John 17:20-23

<sup>4</sup> 2 Pet. 1:2-4

proceed to the second expression which the soul has made use of to describe that which He gave it.

*“The song of the sweet nightingale.”*

9. Out of this “breathing of the air” comes the sweet voice of the Beloved addressing Himself to the soul, in which the soul sends forth its own sweet song of joy to Him. Both are meant by the song of the nightingale. As the song of the nightingale is heard in the spring of the year, when the cold, and rain, and changes of winter are past, filling the ear with melody, and the mind with joy; so, in the true intercourse and transformation of love, which takes place in this life, the bride, now protected and delivered from all trials and changes of the world, detached, and free from the imperfections, sufferings, and darkness both of mind and body, becomes conscious of a new spring in liberty, largeness, and joy of spirit, in which she hears the sweet voice of the Bridegroom, Who is her sweet nightingale, renewing and refreshing the very substance of her soul, now prepared for the journey of everlasting life.

10. That voice is sweet to her ears, and calls her sweetly, as it is written: “Arise, make haste, My love, My dove, My beautiful one, and come. For winter is now past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers have appeared in our land, the time of pruning is come: the voice of the turtle is heard in our land.”<sup>1</sup> When the bride hears the voice of the Bridegroom in her inmost soul, she feels that her troubles are over and her prosperity begun. In the refreshing comfort and sweet sense of this voice she, too, like the nightingale, sends forth a new song of rejoicing to God, in unison with Him Who now moves her to do so.

11. It is for this that the Beloved sings, that the bride in unison with Him may sing to God; this is the aim and desire of the Bridegroom, that the soul should sing with the spirit joyously to God; and this is what He asks of the bride in the Canticle: “Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come; my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow places of the wall, show me your face, let your voice sound in my ears.”<sup>2</sup>

12. The ears of God signify the desire He has that the soul should sing in perfect joy. And that this song may be perfect, the Bridegroom bids the soul to send it forth, and to let it sound in the clefts of the rock, that is, in the transformation which is the fruit of the mysteries of Christ, of which I spoke just now.<sup>3</sup> And because in this union of the soul with God, the soul sings to Him together with Him, in the way I spoke of when I was speaking of love,<sup>4</sup> the song of praise is most perfect and pleasing to God; for the acts of the soul, in the state of perfection, are most perfect; and thus the song of its rejoicing is sweet to God as well as to itself.

13. “Your voice is sweet,”<sup>5</sup> says the Bridegroom, “not only to you, but also to Me, for as we are one, your voice is also in unison and one with Mine.” This is the Canticle which the soul sings in the transformation which takes place in this life,

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 2:10-12

<sup>2</sup> Cant. 2:13,14

<sup>3</sup> Stanza xxxvii. sect. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Stanza xxxviii. sect. 6.

<sup>5</sup> Cant. 2:14

about which no exaggeration is possible. But as this song is not so perfect as the new song in the life of glory, the soul, having a foretaste of that by what it feels on earth, shadows forth by the grandeur of this the magnificence of that in glory, which is beyond all comparison nobler, and calls it to mind and says that what its portion there will be is the song of the sweet nightingale.

*“The grove and its beauty.”*

14. This is the third thing which the Bridegroom is to give the soul. The grove, because it contains many plants and animals, signifies God as the Creator and Giver of life to all creatures, which have their being and origin from Him, reveal Him and make Him known as the Creator. The beauty of the grove, which the soul prays for, is not only the grace, wisdom, and loveliness which flow from God over all created things, whether in heaven or on earth, but also the beauty of the mutual harmony and wise arrangement of the inferior creation, and the higher also, and of the mutual relations of both. The knowledge of this gives the soul great joy and delight. The fourth request is:

*“In the serene night.”*

15. That is, contemplation, in which the soul desires to behold the grove. It is called night, because contemplation is dim; and that is the reason why it is also called mystical theology—that is, the secret or hidden wisdom of God, where, without the sound of words, or the intervention of any bodily or spiritual sense, as it were in silence and in repose, in the darkness of sense and nature, God teaches the soul—and the soul knows not how—in a most secret and hidden way.

16. Some spiritual writers call this “understanding without understanding,” because it does not take place in what philosophers call the active understanding which is conversant with the forms, fancies, and apprehensions of the physical faculties, but in the understanding as it is possible and passive, which without receiving such forms receives passively only the substantial knowledge of them free from all imagery. This occurs without effort or exertion on its part, and for this reason contemplation is called night, in which the soul through the channel of its transformation learns in this life that it already possesses, in a supreme degree, this divine grove, together with its beauty.

17. Still, however clear may be its knowledge, it is dark night in comparison with that of the blessed, for which the soul prays. Hence, while it prays for the clear contemplation, that is, the fruition of the grove, and its beauty; with the other objects here enumerated, it says, let it be in the night now serene; that is, in the clear beatific contemplation: let the night of dim contemplation cease here below, and change into the clear contemplation of the serene vision of God above. Thus the serene night is the clear and unclouded contemplation of the face of God. It was to this night of contemplation that David referred when he said, “Night shall be my light in my pleasures”;<sup>1</sup> that is, when I shall have my delight in the essential vision of God, the night of contemplation will have dawned in the day and light of my understanding.

*“With the flame that consumes, and gives no pain.”*

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 138:11

18. This flame is the love of the Holy Spirit. “Consumes” means absolute perfection. Therefore, when the soul says that the Beloved will give it all that is mentioned in this stanza, and that they will be its possession in love absolute and perfect, all of them and itself with them in perfect love, and that without pain, its purpose is to show forth the utter perfection of love. Love, to be perfect, must have these two properties: it must consume and transform the soul in God; the burning and transformation wrought in the soul by the flame must give no pain. But this can be only in the state of the blessed, where the flame is sweet love, for in this transformation of the soul therein there is a blessed agreement and contentment on both sides, and no change to a greater or less degree gives pain, as before, when the soul had attained to the state of perfect love.

19. But the soul having attained to this state abides in its love of God, a love so like His and so sweet, God being, as Moses says,<sup>1</sup> a consuming fire—“the Lord your God is a consuming fire”—that it perfects and renews it. But this transformation is not like that which is wrought in this life, which though most perfect and in love consummate was still in some measure consuming the soul and wearing it away. It was like fire in burning coals, for though the coals may be transformed into fire, and made like it, and ceased from seething, and smoke no longer arises from them as before they were wholly transformed into fire, still, though they have become perfect fire, the fire consumes them and reduces them to ashes.

20. So is it with the soul which in this life is transformed by perfect love: for though it is wholly conformed, yet it still suffers, in some measure, both pain and loss. Pain, on account of the beatific transformation which is still wanting; loss, through the weakness and corruption of the flesh coming in contact with love so strong and so deep; for everything that is grand hurts and pains our natural infirmity, as it is written, “The corruptible body is a load upon the soul.”<sup>2</sup> But in the life of bliss there will be neither loss nor pain, though the sense of the soul will be most acute, and its love without measure, for God will give power to the former and strength to the latter, perfecting the understanding in His wisdom and the will in His love.

21. As, in the foregoing stanzas, and in the one which follows, the bride prays for the boundless knowledge of God, for which she requires the strongest and the deepest love that she may love Him in proportion to the grandeur of His communications, she prays now that all these things may be bestowed upon her in love consummated, perfect, and strong.

---

<sup>1</sup> Deut. 4:24

<sup>2</sup> Wisd. 9:15

## STANZA XL

*None saw it;  
Neither did Aminadab appear  
The siege was intermitted,  
And the cavalry dismounted  
At the sight of the waters.*

THE bride perceiving that the desire of her will is now detached from all things, cleaving to God with most fervent love; that the sensual part of the soul, with all its powers, faculties, and desires, is now conformed to the spirit; that all rebellion is quelled forever; that Satan is overcome and driven far away in the varied contest of the spiritual struggle; that her soul is united and transformed in the rich abundance of the heavenly gifts; and that she herself is now prepared, strong and apparelled, “leaning upon her Beloved,” to go up “by the desert”<sup>1</sup> of death; full of joy to the glorious throne of her espousals,—she is longing for the end, and puts before the eyes of her Bridegroom, in order to influence Him the more, all that is mentioned in the present stanza, these five considerations:

2. The first is that the soul is detached from all things and a stranger to them. The second is that the devil is overcome and put to flight. The third is that the passions are subdued, and the natural desires mortified. The fourth and the fifth are that the sensual and lower nature of the soul is changed and purified, and so conformed to the spiritual, as not only not to hinder spiritual blessings, but is, on the contrary, prepared for them, for it is even a partaker already, according to its capacity, of those which have been bestowed upon it.

*“None saw it.”*

3. That is, my soul is so detached, so denuded, so lonely, so estranged from all created things, in heaven and earth; it has become so recollected in You, that nothing whatever can come within sight of that most intimate joy which I have in You. That is, there is nothing whatever that can cause me pleasure with its sweetness, or disgust with its vileness; for my soul is so far removed from all such things, absorbed in such profound delight in You, that nothing can behold me. This is not all, for:

*“Neither did Aminadab appear.”*

4. Aminadab, in the Holy Writings, signifies the devil; that is the enemy of the soul, in a spiritual sense, who is ever fighting against it, and disturbing it with his innumerable artillery, that it may not enter into the fortress and secret place of interior recollection with the Bridegroom. There, the soul is so protected, so strong, so triumphant in virtue which it then practices, so defended by God’s right hand, that the devil not only dares not approach it, but runs away from it in great fear, and does not venture to appear. The practice of virtue, and the state of perfection to which the soul has come, is a victory over Satan, and causes him

---

<sup>1</sup> Cant. 3:6; 8:5

such terror that he cannot present himself before it. Thus Aminadab did not appear with any right to keep the soul away from the object of its desire.

*“The siege was intermitted.”*

5. By the siege is meant the passions and desires, which, when not overcome and mortified, surround the soul and fight against it on all sides. Hence the term “siege” is applied to them. This siege is “intermitted”—that is, the passions are subject to reason and the desires mortified. Under these circumstances the soul entreats the Beloved to communicate to it those graces for which it has prayed, for now the siege is no hindrance. Until the four passions of the soul are ordered in reason according to God, and until the desires are mortified and purified, the soul is incapable of seeing God.

*“The cavalry dismounted at the sight of the waters.”*

6. The waters are the spiritual joys and blessings which the soul now enjoys interiorly with God. The cavalry is the bodily senses of the sensual part, interior as well as exterior, for they carry with them the phantasms and figures of their objects. They dismount now at the sight of the waters, because the sensual and lower part of the soul in the state of spiritual marriage is purified, and in a certain way spiritualized, so that the soul with its powers of sense and natural forces becomes so recollected as to participate and rejoice, in their way, in the spiritual grandeurs which God communicates to it in the spirit within. To this the Psalmist referred when he said, “My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.”<sup>1</sup>

7. It is to be observed that the cavalry did not dismount to taste of the waters, but only at the sight of them, because the sensual part of the soul, with its powers, is incapable of tasting substantially and properly the spiritual blessings, not merely in this life, but also in the life to come. Still, because of a certain overflowing of the spirit, they are sensibly refreshed and delighted, and this delight attracts them—that is, the senses with their bodily powers—towards that interior recollection where the soul is drinking the waters of the spiritual benedictions. This condition of the senses is rather a dismounting at the sight of the waters than a dismounting for the purpose of seeing or tasting them. The soul says of them that they dismounted, not that they went, or did anything else, and the meaning is that in the communication of the sensual with the spiritual part of the soul, when the spiritual waters become its drink, the natural operations subside and merge into spiritual recollection.

8. All these perfections and dispositions of the soul the bride sets forth before her Beloved, the Son of God, longing at the same time to be translated by Him out of the spiritual marriage, to which God has been pleased to advance her in the Church militant, to the glorious marriage of the Church triumphant. To that end may He bring of His mercy all those who call upon the most sweet name of Jesus, the Bridegroom of faithful souls, to Whom be all honor and glory, together with the Father and the Holy Spirit,

IN SÆCULA SÆCULORUM.

---

<sup>1</sup> Ps. 83:3





## INDEX

- Absence, pain of, 32, 53
- Adam, fall of, 178
- Adoption, 270
- Altruism, 190
- Aminadab, 132, 305
- Angels, service of, 59
- Aridity, remedy against, 137; good works performed in time of, 232
- Ark, the, 104, 259
- Attraction, the divine, 192
  
- Balsam, the divine, 192
- Beauty, the divine, 271
- Bed of the soul, 181
- Beginners, likened to new wine, 196
- Betrothal, the spiritual, 105, 144; time of, 171; effects of, 213
- Breathing, the divine, 292
- Bridegroom, the, among the flowers, 143; captivity of, 242; solitude of, 265; beauty of, 269
  
- Charity, effects of, 104; purple robe of, 187; bond of perfection, 236
- Confirmation in grace, 172
- Contemplation, effects of, 101; not granted to all spiritual persons, 101; mystical theology, 213; why called night, 299
- Contempt, 252
- Courage, true, rare, 227
- Creation, meditation on, 47; the work of God only, 48; testimony of, 50; beauty of, 52; a revelation, 62; a manifestation of God, 124
- Cross, the, betrothal of, 179
  
- David and Jonathan, 239
- Death, 82; why the soul desires, 275
- Deification, 204
- Delilah, treachery of, 25
- Detachment, perfect, 135, 176, 220, 265, 304
- Dionysius, St., 117
- Distractions, 157
- Dove, the, 258
  
- Ecstasies, source of, 96; sufferings of the soul in, 97, 118; cessation of, 99
- Elijah, St., 116
- Eternity, day of, 287
  
- Faith, sole means of union with God, 86; crystal spring, 87
- Flight of the soul, 102
- Foxes, the spiritual, 130; operations of, 131
- Francis, St. saying of, 108
  
- Garden, the, of the Beloved, 139, 173
- Garlands, the, 233
- Glory, essential, 286
- God, hidden, 16; visits to the soul, 28; how to be sought, 40, 42; greatest works of, 58; light of the soul, 74; the guide of the perfect soul, 261; judgments of, 277
- Groanings of the soul, 26, 32
  
- Heart, the, satisfaction of, 262
- Hope, when painless, 163
  
- Imperfections of the advanced, 210
- Incarnation, the, 52
- Inebriation, the divine, 194
  
- Judgments of God, 277
  
- Knowledge and love, 271; of the just in heaven, 273; the divine, 273
- Knowledge, supernatural, 271; worldly, 274
  
- Life, active and contemplative, 41; natural and spiritual, 64
- Limbo, 82
- Look, the divine, 242, 256
- Love, wounds of, 27; sufferings of, 35; tests of love of God, 68; love the reward of, 69, 104; anxieties of, 72; malady of, 83; causes equality, 185, 217; visit of, 191; solitary, 224; perfect, 286, 301; property of, 286, 301

Manoaah, 81  
 Marriage, the spiritual, 92, 154, 170,  
     201, 266  
 Mary Magdalene, St., 71, 224  
 Merit, 248  
 Mysteries of God, 277  
  
 Neck, the, of the bride, 175  
 Night, difficulties of, 43  
 Nightingale, song of the, 296  
 Noah, 104, 106  
 Nymphs, the, of Judea, 146  
  
 Paradise, flowers of, 49  
 Passions, the effects of, 210  
 Paul, St., vision of, 150  
 Perfection, form and substance of, 216  
 Pomegranates, 280; wine of, 281  
 Prayer, 25, 37  
 Preachers, popular, 224  
 Predestination, 282  
 Presence of God in the soul, 75  
 Proficients, liable to ecstasies, 99  
  
 Rapture, 96  
  
 Satan, power of, 45, 129; afraid of  
     perfect soul, 184; overcome, 303  
 Sin forgiven, 250  
 Solitude, 262  
 Soul, longings of, 15; wounds of, 29;  
     presence of God in 77; health  
     of, 84; greatest trial of, 136  
 Sparrow, the lonely, 122  
 Supper, the spiritual, 126  
 Sweetness, spiritual, effects of, 101  
  
 Teresa, St., writings of, 100  
 Terrors of the night, 161, 166  
 Theology, mystic, 213, 299; scholastic,  
     4  
 Thirst, the living, 18, 92  
 Torrents, 110; of delight, 199  
 Touch, the divine, 28, 114, 193  
 Transformation, effects of, 202, 206,  
     283, 302  
 Trinity, 292  
 Truths of the faith, 90; the beatific,  
     291  
  
 Understanding without  
     understanding, 300

Union, divine, the highest state in  
     this life, 23, 284; when perfect,  
     286; actual and habitual, 135,  
     204

Virtues acquired in youth, 232; unity  
     of, 240

Visions, two, fatal to man, 80

Voice, interior, 111

Waters, the divine, 1

Wine, 196

Wisdom, the divine, 4; of God and the  
     world, 206

World, the wisdom of, 226

Wounds, of the soul, remedy for, 30;  
     pain of, 55; effects of, 65,66

# The Living Flame Of Love by St. John of the Cross

Translation by: Kieran Kavanaugh, OCD and Otilio Rodriguez, OCD, Rev. Ed.

- 
- [Introduction To The Living Flame Of Love](#)
  - [Prologue](#)
  - [STANZA 1](#)
  - [STANZA 1 \(24-36\)](#)
  - [STANZA 2](#)
  - [STANZA 2 \(21-36\)](#)
  - [STANZA 3](#)
  - [STANZA 3 \(25-46\)](#)
  - [STANZA 3 \(47-67\)](#)
  - [STANZA 3 \(68-85\)](#)
  - [STANZA 4](#)
-

# Introduction To The Living Flame Of Love

## The Poem

The stanzas of The Living Flame of Love sing of an elevated union within the intimate depths of the spirit. The subject matter is exalted, so much so that John dares speak of it only with a deeply recollected soul. The image of flame, working on the wood, dispelling the moisture, turning it black, then giving it the qualities of fire, appeared first in the Dark Night. In the Canticle it turns up again in the serene night toward the end of the poem, a flame that is painless, comforting, and conformed to God. This flame, John told us there, is the love of the Holy Spirit. Now, having grown hotter and sometimes flaring up, it impels the Carmelite friar to write more verses about the sublime communion taking place in his deepest center.

At this depth he lives in both stable serenity and exalted activity; the tone is prolonged admiration and holy ardor. The six-line length of each stanza, the sounds, the rhythm, convey these characteristics.

All the verses of the poem point to the same profundity; there is no progressive movement from stage to stage. The focus is on the present, on what is taking place now. Only a few times is there a glance toward what went before, and then merely for the sake of stating that the past has unfolded into the peace and plenitude of the present.

John wrote this brief lyric creation that so ardently and closely approaches the mystery of divine union for Doña Ana de Peñalosa, a devout laywoman whom he directed. It is the only instance we know of in which he composed a poem for another, although we do not know whether he did so in answer to a request from her. What is certain is that he composed these stanzas burning in love's flame, with the intimate and delicate sweetness of love.

## The Commentary

As John composed his commentary on the stanzas of the Spiritual Canticle, those close to him made copies and circulated them. It is not surprising that Ana de Peñalosa would ask for another commentary, one on the magnificent stanzas John had written for her. If we consider the mentality of the times, when many frowned on the practice of mental prayer among women (as we know from St. Teresa's experience) and thought of sanctity as a pursuit more suited to monks and friars, it is surprising that John wrote this loftiest of his works for a laywoman. The only thing that made him hesitate to respond to her pleadings was his difficulty in speaking of what pertained to the intimate depths of one's being. He waited for a spirit of recollection and fervor to descend on him, as seems to have been the case with his poems. Then he wrote the work, immersed in the flame, in the shortest space of time, within a span of two weeks (according to Fray Juan Evangelista), and at a time, in 1586, when he had many other duties as vicar provincial of Andalusia. The profound recollection he required of himself referred to the interior quality of his life, not to a freedom from business matters and concerns. He waited for an opportunity in which he could almost relive the moment of the poem, and thus the commentary bears much of the poetry's light and heat, its symbolism and lyric tone.

As with the Dark Night and the Spiritual Canticle, he follows his customary procedure: first he cites the entire poem; then, repeating each stanza separately, he sums up its content; finally, he explains each verse in particular. The commentary of the Flame is more prolonged than that of the Canticle, but not as extended as in the Night. At times, rather than adhere to a simple interpretation of these expressions of his own experience,

he heeds the call to be a spiritual teacher and enters into digressions that enlarge the commentary. The paramount one occurs in the third stanza, numbers 27-67. There he explains how souls must watch what they are doing and into whose hands they commit themselves so as not to impede God's work and thereby stumble and slip back on their journey.

John also teaches about some other topics that lie outside the immediate scope of the poem: the soul's purgation wrought previously by the flame (1. 19-25); the cause and mode of death of those who have reached the state of transformation (1. 30); transpiercing of the soul and impression of the stigmata (2. 9-14); the necessity of suffering in order to reach transformation in God (2. 25-30); the thirst, hunger, and longing of the spiritual faculties experienced toward the end of purification and illumination (3. 18-26).

On the whole, as with the poem itself, John's concentration is on the present, the high goal from which he may glance fleetingly at the past or look to a future glory intuited rather than fully known from his present horizon. He begins where he left off in the *Spiritual Canticle*, with the highest degree of perfection attainable in this life, transformation in God, called also spiritual marriage.

Within this state love can become more ardent, and the wood more incandescent and inflamed. In other words, the love is deeper in quality and more perfect within this very state of transformation. What this means is that there is greater likelihood for habitual union to become actual, for the fire to burst into flame. The activity of the Holy Spirit is now more powerful, the experiences are on the borderline between faith and eternal glory. In different modes the stanzas concentrate on the same realities. Thus as he interprets his poem for us, John explains how there are two different aspects of union with God and the total union experienced in the substance and faculties of the soul may be either habitual or actual. The actual union, always a passing phenomenon, never becomes permanent on this earth. The habitual union of love is compatible with everyday life, less intense in form. Here John is speaking of those moments in which God's special self-communication is more alive and intense. He refers to these symbolically as living flames, delightful wounds, splendors from the lamps of fire, and awakenings of the Beloved.

The dominant theme is the wonderful work of God in his Trinitarian Being, illumining and delighting and absorbing the soul in the embrace of love. And John here describes and gives witness to this mystical experience taking place in his deepest center, in the profound caverns of his being. This is a new country to which he brings us. Now he speaks more of glorification than of purification. His absorption is not in some undetermined absolute, but in communion with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The heightened periods of sublime union are like glimpses of glory offered to the spirit. It is as though the Holy Spirit were summoning a person to the next life by the immense glory he marvelously and with gentle affection places before its eyes. This is made possible by a highly illumined faith, the veil being now so thin that it no longer cloaks the light with darkness but allows it to begin to seep through. This soul finds as well a remarkable new delight in all of creation, for it now knows creatures in God. Absorbed in God, enlivened by his loving presence and communication, it receives a foretaste of eternal life. At the time of these glorious encounters, the soul comes within a step of departing from earth.

John senses that people may either think he is exaggerating or not believe him at all; in fact, what he says seems to him as far short of the reality as a painting is from the living object. He notes in such human skepticism a failure to understand who God really is, that the Lord delights in being with the children of this earth. Why should we marvel that he wants to be so prodigal in giving? John points out that lovers love and do good to others in the measure of their own nature and properties. Because God is liberal, the reasoning continues, he loves and favors and does good to us liberally. But perhaps Ana de Peñalosa was herself able to share something of the very realities John was describing. Those who are cleansed and enkindled with love are in the position to taste and relish this language of God; others without this preparation may find the words uninteresting, bitter, or incredible.

As with the *Spiritual Canticle*, two redactions have come down to us and are referred to as Flame A and

Flame B. But the likeness to the Canticle stops there, for the differences between the two versions of the Flame are not notable. Without any change in the sequence of the stanzas, the modifications in the second redaction, Flame B, consist only of some clarifying insertions and some more detailed doctrinal explanations. Most probably John introduced these variations into the text while at La Peñuela in the last months of his life, August-September 1591. A witness who lived with him at La Peñuela told of how in the early morning John used to withdraw into the garden for prayer and remain there until, coaxed by the heat of the sun, he returned to his monastery cell where he spent his time writing on certain stanzas of poetry. By this date all his other works, including the Canticle, had reached their final stage. Moreover John brought a copy of the work with him to Ubeda. He gave it as a gift in gratitude to Ambrosio de Villareal, the doctor who had cared for him there. What must have been the doctor's thoughts as he read of "how much God exalts the soul that pleases him"?

The work may be divided this way:

### **Stanza 1**

The nature and work of the flame (1-26).

In the deepest center.

A flame that previously purged.

The desire for glory (27-36).

The veils of separation.

The death of love.

### **Stanza 2**

The work of the three divine Persons in the soul's substance (1-22).

The blazing, wounding fire of the Holy Spirit.

The powerful, bounteous hand of the Father.

The delicate, delightful touch of the Word.

The hundredfold reward (23-36).

### **Stanza 3**

The splendors produced by the lamps of fire (1-76).

The work of both the soul and the Holy Spirit.

The deep capacities of the caverns of the soul.

Cautions against three blind guides.

Blindness caused by the appetites.

The soul's gift to God (77-84).

#### **Stanza 4**

Awakening of the Word; knowledge of creation in him (1-13).

The secret indwelling of God in the soul's substance (14-16).

Participation in the breathing of the Holy Spirit (17).

We have translated the second redaction, or Flame B, and have followed the Codex of Sevilla, consulting as well the Codex of Baeza and the Codex of Toledo, which is a copy of the first redaction.

---

[Back to Index](#)

# Prologue

THE LIVING FLAME OF LOVE

## Jesus Mary Joseph

A commentary on the stanzas that treat of a very intimate and elevated union and transformation of the soul in God, written at the request of Doña Ana de Peñalosa<sup>1</sup> by the author of the stanzas.

### Prologue

1. I have felt somewhat reluctant, very noble and devout lady, to explain these four stanzas as you asked. Since they deal with matters so interior and spiritual, for which words are usually lacking - in that the spiritual surpasses sense - I find it difficult to say something of their content; also, one speaks badly of the intimate depths of the spirit if one does not do so with a deeply recollected soul. Because of my want of such recollection, I have deferred this commentary until now, a period in which the Lord seems to have uncovered some knowledge and bestowed some fervor. This must be the result of your holy desire; perhaps, since I have composed the stanzas for you, His Majesty wants me to explain them for you. I have been encouraged in knowing certainly that through my own ability I shall say nothing worthwhile, especially in matters so sublime and vital, and thus only the faults and mistakes of this commentary will be mine. Submitting it to the judgment and better opinion of our Holy Mother the Roman Catholic Church, by whose rule no one errs, finding my support in Sacred Scripture, and knowing the reader understands that everything I say is as far from the reality as is a painting from the living object represented, I will venture to declare what I know.

2. There is no reason to marvel at God's granting such sublime and strange gifts to souls he decides to favor. If we consider that he is God and that he bestows them as God, with infinite love and goodness, it does not seem unreasonable. For he declared that the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit would take up their abode in those who love him by making them live the life of God and dwell in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit [Jn. 14:23], as the soul points out in these stanzas.

3. Although in the stanzas we have already commented on,<sup>1</sup> we speak of the highest degree of perfection one can reach in this life (transformation in God), these stanzas treat of a love deeper in quality and more perfect within this very state of transformation. Even though it is true that what these and the other stanzas describe is all one state of transformation, and as such one cannot pass beyond it; yet, with time and practice, love can grow deeper in quality, as I say, and become more ardent. We have an example of this in the activity of fire: Although the fire has penetrated the wood, transformed it, and united it with itself, yet as this fire grows hotter and continues to burn, so the wood becomes much more incandescent and inflamed, even to the point of flaring up and shooting out flames from itself.

4. It should be understood that the soul now speaking has reached this enkindled degree, and is so inwardly transformed in the fire of love and elevated by it that it is not merely united to this fire but produces within it a living flame. The soul feels this and speaks of it thus in these stanzas with intimate and delicate sweetness of love, burning in love's flame, and stressing in these stanzas some of the effects of this love.



In this commentary I will use the method I have used before: First I will quote all the stanzas together; then, after recording each stanza separately, I will present a brief explanation of it; finally I will quote each verse and comment upon it.

#### Stanzas the Soul Recites in Intimate Union With God.

1. O living flame of love  
that tenderly wounds my soul  
in its deepest center! Since  
now you are not oppressive,  
now consummate! if it be your will:  
tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!

2. O sweet cautery,  
O delightful wound!  
O gentle hand! O delicate touch  
that tastes of eternal life  
and pays every debt!  
In killing you changed death to life.

3. O lamps of fire!  
in whose splendors  
the deep caverns of feeling,  
once obscure and blind,  
now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,  
both warmth and light to their Beloved.

4. How gently and lovingly  
you wake in my heart,  
where in secret you dwell alone;  
and in your sweet breathing,  
filled with good and glory,  
how tenderly you swell my heart with love.

The composition of these lyric lines is like those that in Boscón are given a religious meaning and that go:

La soledad siguiendo.  
llorando mi fortuna,  
me voy por los caminos que se ofrecen, and so on.

In these stanzas there are six lines; the fourth rhymes with the first, the fifth with the second, and the sixth with the third.<sup>2</sup>

## STANZA 1

O living flame of love  
that tenderly wounds my soul  
in its deepest center! Since  
now you are not oppressive,  
now consummate! if it be your will:  
tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!

### Commentary

1. The soul now feels that it is all inflamed in the divine union, its palate is all bathed in glory and love, that in the intimate part of its substance it is flooded with no less than rivers of glory, abounding in delights, and from its depths flow rivers of living water [Jn. 7:38], which the Son of God declared will rise up in such souls. It seems, because it is so forcefully transformed in God, so sublimely possessed by him, and arrayed with such rich gifts and virtues, that it is singularly close to beatitude - so close that only a thin veil separates it.

And the soul sees that every time the delicate flame of love, burning within, assails it, it does so as though glorifying it with gentle and powerful glory. Such is the glory this flame of love imparts that each time it absorbs and attacks, it seems that it is about to give eternal life and tear the veil of mortal life, that very little is lacking, and that because of this lack the soul does not receive eternal glory completely. With ardent desire the soul tells the flame, the Holy Spirit, to tear the veil of mortal life now by that sweet encounter in which he truly communicates entirely what he is seemingly about to give each time he encounters it, that is, complete and perfect glory. And thus it says:

O living flame of love

2. To lay stress on the sentiment and esteem with which it speaks in these four stanzas, the soul uses in all of them the exclamations, "O" and "how," which indicate an affectionate emphasis. Each time they are uttered they reveal more about the interior than the tongue expresses. "O" serves to express intense desire and to use persuasion in petitioning. The soul uses this expression for both reasons in this stanza because it intimates and stresses its tremendous desire, persuading love to loose it.

3. This flame of love is the Spirit of its Bridegroom, who is the Holy Spirit. The soul feels him within itself not only as a fire that has consumed and transformed it but as a fire that burns and flares within it, as I mentioned. And that flame, every time it flares up, bathes the soul in glory and refreshes it with the quality of divine life.

Such is the activity of the Holy Spirit in the soul transformed in love: The interior acts he produces shoot up flames, for they are acts of inflamed love, in which the will of the soul united with that flame, made one with it, loves most sublimely. Thus these acts of love are most precious; one of them is more meritorious

and valuable than all the deeds a person may have performed in the whole of life without this transformation, however great they may have been. The same difference lying between a habit and an act lies between the transformation in love and the flame of love. It is like the difference between the wood on fire and the flame leaping up from it, for the flame is the effect of the fire present there.

4. We can compare the soul in its ordinary condition in this state of transformation of love to the log of wood that is ever immersed in fire, and the acts of this soul to the flame that blazes up from the fire of love. The more intense the fire of union, the more vehemently does this fire burst into flames. The acts of the will are united to this flame and ascend, carried away and absorbed in the flame of the Holy Spirit, just as the angel mounted to God in the flame of Manoah's sacrifice [Jgs. 13:20].

Thus in this state the soul cannot make acts because the Holy Spirit makes them all and moves it toward them. As a result all the acts of the soul are divine, since both the movement to these acts and their execution stem from God.<sup>1</sup>

It seems to such persons that every time this flame shoots up, making them love with delight and divine quality, it is giving them eternal life, since it raises them up to the activity of God in God.

5. This is the language and these the words God speaks in souls that are purged, cleansed, and all enkindled; as David exclaimed: Your word is exceedingly enkindled [Ps. 119:139]; and the prophet: Are not my words, perchance, like a fire? [Jer. 23:29]. As God himself says through St. John, these words are spirit and life [Jn. 6:63]. These words are perceived by souls who have ears to hear them, those souls, as I say, that are cleansed and enamored. Those who do not have a sound palate, but seek other tastes, cannot taste the spirit and life of God's words; his words, rather, are distasteful to them.

Hence the loftier were the words of the Son of God, the more tasteless they were to the impure, as happened when he preached the sovereign and loving doctrine of the Holy Eucharist, for many turned away [Jn. 6:60-61, 66].

6. Those who do not relish this language God speaks within them must not think on this account that others do not taste it. St. Peter tasted it in his soul when he said to Christ: Lord, where shall we go? You have the words of eternal life [Jn. 6:68]. And the Samaritan woman forgot the water and the water jar for the sweetness of God's words [Jn. 4:28].

Since this soul is so close to God that it is transformed into a flame of love in which the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit are communicated to it, how can it be thought incredible that it enjoy a foretaste of eternal life? Yet it does not enjoy eternal life perfectly since the conditions of this life do not allow it. But the delight that the flaring of the Holy Spirit generates in the soul is so sublime that it makes it know that which savors of eternal life. Thus it refers to this flame as living, not because the flame is not always living but because of this effect; it makes the soul live in God spiritually and experience the life of God in the manner David mentions: My heart and my flesh rejoiced in the living God [Ps. 84:2]. David did not refer to God as living because of a necessity to do so, for God is always living, but in order to manifest that the spirit and the senses, transformed in God, enjoy him in a living way, which is to taste the living God - that is, God's life, eternal life. Nor did David call him the living God other than because he enjoyed him in a living way, although not perfectly, but as though by a glimpse of eternal life. Thus in this flame the soul experiences God so vividly and tastes him

with such delight and sweetness that it exclaims: O living flame of love!

that tenderly wounds my soul

7. That is, that with your ardor tenderly touches me. Since this flame is a flame of divine life, it wounds the soul with the tenderness of God's life, and it wounds and stirs it so deeply as to make it dissolve in love. What the bride affirmed in the Song of Songs is fulfilled in the soul. She was so moved that her soul melted, and so she says: As soon as he spoke my soul melted [Sg. 5:6]. For God's speech is the effect he produces in the soul.

8. But how can one claim that the flame wounds the soul, since there is nothing left in it to wound now that it is all cauterized with the fire of love? It is something splendid that since love is never idle, but in continual motion, it is always emitting flames everywhere like a blazing fire, and since its duty is to wound in order to cause love and delight, and it is present in this soul as a living flame, it dispatches its wounds like most tender flares of delicate love. Joyfully and festively it practices the arts and games of love, as though in the palace of its nuptials, as Ahasuerus did with his bride Esther [Est. 2:16-18]. God shows his graces there, manifests his riches and the glory of his grandeur that in this soul might be fulfilled what he asserted in Proverbs: I was delighted every day, playing before him all the time, playing in the world. And my delights were to be with the children of the earth [Prv. 8:30-31], that is, by bestowing delights on them. Hence these wounds (his games) are flames of tender touches; arising from the fire of love, which is not idle, they suddenly touch the soul. These, it says, occur inwardly and wound the soul.

in its deepest center!

9. This feast takes place in the substance of the soul where neither the center of the senses nor the devil can reach. Therefore, the more interior it is, the more secure, substantial, and delightful, because the more interior it is, the purer it is. And the greater the purity, the more abundantly, frequently, and generously God communicates himself. Thus the delight and joy of the soul is so much more intense because God is the doer of all without the soul's doing anything. Since the soul cannot do any work of its own save through the means and aid of the corporeal senses, from which in this event it is very free and far removed, its sole occupation now is to receive from God, who alone can move the soul and do his work in its depths. Thus all the movements of this soul are divine. Although they belong to it, they belong to it because God works them in it and with it, for it wills and consents to them.<sup>2</sup> Since by saying that the flame wounds in its deepest center the soul indicates that it has other, less profound centers, we ought to explain what is meant by these words.

10. First it should be known that the soul, insofar as it is a spirit, does not possess in its being high and low, deeper or less deep, as do quantitative bodies. Since it has no parts, there is no difference as to inward and outward; it is all one kind and does not have degrees of quantitative depth. It cannot receive greater illumination in one part than in another like physical bodies, but all of it is illumined equally in a degree of greater or lesser intensity, like air that is illumined or not illumined according to degrees.

11. The deepest center of an object we take to signify the farthest point attainable by that object's being and power and force of operation and movement. So fire or a rock have the natural power and motion necessary to reach their center, but they cannot pass beyond it. They can fail to reach and rest in this center if a powerful contrary movement impedes them.

Accordingly, we assert that when a rock is in the ground it is, after a fashion, in its center, even though it is not in its deepest center, for it is within the sphere of its center, activity, and movement; yet we do not assert that it has reached its deepest center, which is the middle of the earth. Thus the rock always possesses the

power, strength, and inclination to go deeper and reach the ultimate and deepest center; and this it would do if the hindrance were removed. When once it arrives and no longer has any power or inclination toward further movement, we declare that it is in its deepest center.

12. The soul's center is God. When it has reached God with all the capacity of its being and the strength of its operation and inclination, it will have attained its final and deepest center in God, it will know, love, and enjoy God with all its might. When it has not reached this point (as happens in this mortal life, in which the soul cannot reach God with all its strength, even though in its center - which is God through grace and his self-communication to it), it still has movement and strength for advancing further and is not satisfied. Although it is in its center, it is not yet in its deepest center, for it can go deeper in God.

13. It is noteworthy, then, that love is the inclination, strength, and power for the soul in making its way to God, for love unites it with God. The more degrees of love it has, the more deeply it enters into God and centers itself in him. We can say that there are as many centers in God possible to the soul, each one deeper than the other, as there are degrees of love of God possible to it. A stronger love is a more unitive love, and we can understand in this manner the many mansions the Son of God declared were in his Father's house [Jn. 14:2].

Hence, for the soul to be in its center - which is God, as we have said - it is sufficient for it to possess one degree of love, for by one degree alone it is united with him through grace. Should it have two degrees, it becomes united and concentrated in God in another, deeper center. Should it reach three, it centers itself in a third. But once it has attained the final degree, God's love has arrived at wounding the soul in its ultimate and deepest center, which is to illuminate and transform it in its whole being, power, and strength, and according to its capacity, until it appears to be God.

When light shines on a clean and pure crystal, we find that the more intense the degree of light, the more light the crystal has concentrated within it and the brighter it becomes; it can become so brilliant from the abundance of light received that it seems to be all light. And then the crystal is undistinguishable from the light, since it is illumined according to its full capacity, which is to appear to be light.

14. When the soul asserts that the flame of love wounds it in its deepest center, it means that insofar as this flame reaches its substance, power, and strength, the Holy Spirit assails and wounds it. It does not make such an assertion to indicate that this wounding is as essential and integral as in the beatific vision of the next life. Even though a soul attains to as lofty a state of perfection in this mortal life as that which we are discussing, it neither can nor does reach the perfect state of glory, although perhaps in a passing way God might grant it some similar favor. Yet the soul says this in order to manifest the fullness and abundance of delight and glory it feels in this kind of communication from the Holy Spirit. This delight is so much more intense and tender the stronger and more substantially the soul is transformed and concentrated in God. Since this center is the furthest attainable in the present life - although not as perfectly attainable as in the next - the soul refers to it as the deepest center.

Even though the soul can perhaps possess in this life a habit of charity as perfect as in the next, yet the operation and fruition of charity in this life will not be so perfect, even though the operation and fruition of love increase to such a degree in this state that there is great resemblance to the beatific state. The similarity is such that the soul dares to affirm only what it would dare affirm about the next life, that is: in the deepest center of my soul.

15. Since these rare experiences (which are what we ascribe to the soul in this state) are more remarkable than credible, I do not doubt that some persons, not understanding them through their own knowledge or knowing of them through experience, will either fail to believe them or consider the account an exaggeration; or they will think these experiences less than what they really are.

Yet I reply to all these persons that the Father of lights [Jas. 1:17], who is not closefisted but diffuses himself abundantly as the sun does its rays, without being a respecter of persons [Acts 10:34], wherever there is room - always showing himself gladly along the highways and byways - does not hesitate or consider it of little import to find his delights with the children of the earth at a common table in the world [Prv. 8:31].

It should not be held as incredible in a soul now examined, purged, and tried in the fire of tribulations, trials, and many kinds of temptations, and found faithful in love, that the promise of the Son of God be fulfilled, the promise that the Most Blessed Trinity will come and dwell in anyone who loves him [Jn. 14:23]. The Blessed Trinity inhabits the soul by divinely illumining its intellect with the wisdom of the Son, delighting its will in the Holy Spirit, and absorbing it powerfully and mightily in the unfathomed embrace of the Father's sweetness.

16. If he acts thus in some souls, as it is true he does, it should be believed that this soul we are speaking of will not be left behind in regard to receiving these favors from God. For what we are explaining about the activity of the Holy Spirit within it is something far greater than what occurs in the communication and transformation of love. This latter resembles glowing embers; the former is similar to embers that are not merely glowing but have become so hot that they shoot forth a living flame.<sup>3</sup>

And thus these two kinds of union (union of love alone, and union with an inflaming of love) are somehow comparable to the fire of God which, Isaiah says, is in Zion, and to his furnace which is in Jerusalem [Is. 31:9]. The one signifies the Church Militant, in which the fire of charity is not enkindled to an extreme; the other signifies the vision of peace, which is the Church Triumphant,<sup>4</sup> where this fire is like a furnace blazing in the perfection of love. Although, as we said,<sup>5</sup> the soul has not attained such great perfection as is present in this vision of peace, yet, in comparison with the other common union, this union resembles a blazing furnace in which there is a vision much more peaceful and glorious and tender, just as the flame is clearer and more resplendent than the burning coal.

17. The soul, feeling that this living flame of love is vividly communicating to it every good, since this divine love carries all things with it, exclaims: "O living flame of love that tenderly wounds my soul." This is like saying: O enkindled love, with your loving movements you are pleasantly glorifying me according to the greater capacity and strength of my soul, bestowing divine knowledge according to all the ability and capacity of my intellect, communicating love according to the greater power of my will, and rejoicing the substance of my soul with the torrent of your delight, your divine contact and substantial union, in harmony with the greater purity of my substance and the capacity and breath of my memory! And this is what happens, in an indescribable way, at the time this flame of love rises up within the soul.

Since the soul is completely purged in its substance and faculties (memory, intellect, and will), the divine substance, which because of its purity touches everywhere profoundly, subtly, and sublimely, as the Wise Man says [Wis. 7:23-24], absorbs the soul in itself with its divine flame. And in that immersion of the soul in wisdom, the Holy Spirit sets in motion the glorious flickerings of his flame. Since the flame is so gentle the soul adds:

Since now you are not oppressive,

18. This means: since you no longer afflict or distress or weary me as you did before. It should be recalled that when the soul was in the state of spiritual purgation, which was at the time of the beginning of contemplation, this flame of God was not so friendly and gentle toward it as now in this state of union. In order to explain this we will have to delay somewhat.<sup>6</sup>

19. Before the divine fire is introduced into the substance of the soul and united with it through perfect and complete purgation and purity, its flame, which is the Holy Spirit, wounds the soul by destroying and consuming the imperfections of its bad habits. And this is the work of the Holy Spirit, in which he disposes it for divine

union and transformation in God through love.

The very fire of love that afterward is united with the soul, glorifying it, is what previously assailed it by purging it, just as the fire that penetrates a log of wood is the same that first makes an assault on the wood, wounding it with the flame, drying it out, and stripping it of its unsightly qualities until it is so disposed that it can be penetrated and transformed into the fire.

Spiritual writers call this activity the purgative way. In it a person suffers great deprivation and feels heavy afflictions in the spirit that ordinarily overflow into the senses, for this flame is extremely oppressive.

In this preparatory purgation the flame is not bright for a person but dark. If it does shed some light, the only reason is so the soul may see its miseries and defects. It is not gentle but afflictive. Even though it sometimes imparts the warmth of love, it does so with torment and pain. And it is not delightful, but dry. Although sometimes out of his goodness God accords some delight in order to strengthen and encourage it, the soul suffers for this before and afterward with another trial.

Neither is the flame refreshing and peaceful, but it is consuming and contentious, making a person faint and suffer with self-knowledge. Thus it is not glorious for the soul, but rather makes it feel wretched and distressed in the spiritual light of self-knowledge that it bestows. As Jeremiah declares, God sends fire into its bones and instructs it [Lam. 1:13]; and as David also asserts, he tries it with fire [Ps. 17:3].

20. At this stage persons suffer from sharp trials in the intellect, severe dryness and distress in the will, and from the burdensome knowledge of their own miseries in the memory, for their spiritual eye gives them a very clear picture of themselves. In the substance of the soul they suffer abandonment, supreme poverty, dryness, cold, and sometimes heat. They find relief in nothing, nor does any thought console them, nor can they even raise the heart to God, so oppressed are they by this flame. This purgation resembles what Job said God did to him: You have changed to being cruel toward me [Jb. 30:21]. For when the soul suffers all these things jointly, it truly seems that God has become displeased with it and cruel.

21. A person's sufferings at this time cannot be exaggerated; they are but little less than the sufferings of purgatory. I do not know how to explain the severity of this oppression and the intensity of the suffering felt in it, save by what Jeremiah says of it in these words: I am the man that sees my poverty in the rod of his indignation. He has led me and brought me into darkness and not into light. Only against me he has turned and turned again his hand. He has made my skin and my flesh old, and he has broken my bones. He has surrounded me and compassed me with gall and labor. He has set me in dark places as those who are dead forever. He has built around me that I might not get out. He made my fetters heavy. And besides this when I have cried out and prayed, he has shut out my prayer. He shut up my ways with square rocks and turned my steps and paths upside down [Lam. 3:1-9]. Jeremiah laments all this and goes on to say much more.<sup>7</sup>

Since in this fashion God mediates and heals the soul of its many infirmities, bringing it to health, it must necessarily suffer from this purge and cure according to its sickness. For here Tobias is placing the heart on the coals to release and drive out every kind of demon [Tb. 6:8]. All the soul's infirmities are brought to light; they are set before its eyes to be felt and healed.

22. Now with the light and heat of the divine fire, it sees and feels those weaknesses and miseries that previously resided within it, hidden and unfelt, just as the dampness of the log of wood was unknown until the fire applied to it made it sweat and smoke and sputter. And this is what the flame does to the imperfect soul.

For (O wonderful thing!) contraries rise up at this time against contraries - those of the soul against those of God that assail it. And as the philosophers say: One contrary when close to the other makes it more manifest.<sup>8</sup> They war within the soul, striving to expel one another in order to reign. That is: The virtues and

properties of God, extremely perfect, war against the habits and properties of the soul, extremely imperfect; and the soul suffers these two contraries within itself.

When this flame shines on the soul, since its light is excessively brilliant, it shines within the darknesses of the soul, which are also excessive. Persons then feel their natural and vicious darknesses that are contrary to the supernatural light; and they fail to experience the supernatural light because they do not have it within themselves as they do their darknesses - and the darknesses do not comprehend the light [Jn 1:5]. They feel these darknesses inasmuch as the light shines on them, for it is impossible to perceive one's darknesses without the divine light focusing on them. Once they are driven out a soul is illumined and, being transformed, beholds the light within itself, since its spiritual eye was cleansed and fortified by the divine light. A tremendous light causes total darkness in a weak and impure eye, for if a sensible object is too intense it deprives its relative faculty. And thus this flame was oppressive to the intellectual eye.

23. This flame of itself is extremely loving, and the will of itself is excessively dry and hard. When the flame tenderly and lovingly assails the will, hardness is felt beside the tenderness, and dryness beside the love. The will does not feel the love and tenderness of the flame since, because of its contrary hardness and dryness, it is unprepared for this until the love and tenderness of God expel the dryness and hardness and reign within it. Accordingly, this flame was oppressive to the will, making it feel and suffer its own hardness and dryness.

Because this flame is immense and far-reaching, and the will is narrow and restricted, the will feels its confinement and narrowness in the measure that the flame attacks it. It feels this until the flame, penetrating within it, enlarges, widens, and makes it capable of receiving the flame itself.

Because this flame is savory and sweet, and the will possesses a spiritual palate disturbed by the humors of inordinate affections, the flame is unpleasant and bitter to it; and the will cannot taste the sweet food of God's love. And in this fashion it feels distress and distastefulness beside so ample and delightful a flame. The will does not experience the savor of the flame because it does not feel this flame within itself; it only feels what it does have within itself - its own misery.

And finally, because this flame contains immense riches and delights and the soul of itself is extraordinarily poor, without any goods or satisfaction, the soul knows and feels clearly beside this goodness and these riches and delights its own misery, poverty, and evil. For evil cannot comprehend goodness, nor poverty riches, and so on, until this flame purifies a soul completely and by this transformation enriches, glorifies, and delights it.

This flame previously oppressed the soul in an indescribable way, since contraries were battling contraries: God, who is all perfect, against all the imperfections of the soul. God does this so, by transforming the soul into himself, he might soften, pacify, and illumine it, as does fire when it penetrates the log of wood.

---

[Back to Index](#)



## STANZA 1 (24-36)

24. Not many people undergo so strong a purgation, only those whom God wishes to elevate to the highest degree of union. For he prepares individuals by a purification more or less severe in accordance with the degree to which he wishes to raise them, and also according to their impurity and imperfection.<sup>9</sup>

This suffering resembles that of purgatory. Just as the spirits suffer purgation there so as to be able to see God through clear vision in the next life, souls in their own way suffer purgation here on earth so as to be able to be transformed in him through love in this life.

25. In *The Dark Night of The Ascent of Mount Carmel* we dealt with the intensity of this purgation,<sup>10</sup> how it is greater and how less, and when it is in the intellect, when in the will, how it is in the memory, when and how it is also in the soul's substance, and also when it involves the whole soul. We discussed, too, the purgation of the sensory part, and how it can be discerned when the purgation is of the sensory part and when of the spiritual part, and the time or stage along the spiritual road in which each begins. Since we have already explained all of this, and such is not our aim here, I will not go into it again.

Let it suffice to know that the very God who desires to enter within the soul through the union and transformation of love is he who first assails and purges it with the light and heat of his divine flame, just as the fire that penetrates the log of wood is the same that first prepares it for this, as we said.<sup>11</sup> Hence the very flame that is now gentle, since it has entered within the soul, is what was formerly oppressive, assailing it from without.

26. Such is the meaning of the present verse, "Now you are not oppressive." It is in sum like saying: Not only now are you no longer dark as you were before, but you are the divine light of my intellect by which I can look at you; and you not only have ceased making me faint in my weakness, but are rather the strength of my will by which I can love and enjoy you, being wholly converted into divine love; and you are no longer heavy and constraining to the substance of my soul but rather its glory and delight and amplitude, for the words of the divine Song of Songs can be spoken of me: Who is this that comes up from the desert, flowing with delights, leaning upon her Beloved, diffusing love everywhere? [Sg. 8:5]. Since this is true,

now consummate! if it be your will:

27. That is, consummate the spiritual marriage with me perfectly by means of the beatific vision. This is the soul's petition. It is true that in this high state it is as conformed to the will of God and satisfied as it is transformed in love; it wants nothing for itself, nor dares ask for anything, but everything is for its Beloved, since as St. Paul says, charity seeks not things for itself [1 Cor. 13:5], but for the Beloved. Nonetheless, its sigh is as great as what it lacks for the perfect possession of the adoption of the children of God [Rom. 8:23]; for it still lives in hope, in which one cannot fail to feel emptiness. When the soul's glory is consummated, its appetite will come to rest. However intimate may be a person's union with God, there will never be satisfaction and rest until God's glory appears [Ps. 17:15], especially since the savor and sweetness of that glory is now experienced. This experience is so intense that if God had not favored the flesh by fortifying the sensory part with his right hand, as he did Moses in the rock, enabling him to behold the divine glory without dying [Ex. 33:22], nature would be torn apart and death would ensue, since the lower part is unequipped to suffer so much and such a sublime fire of glory.

28. Affliction, then, does not accompany this desire and petition, for the soul is no longer capable of such affliction; but with a gentle and delightful desire it seeks this in the conformity of both spirit and sense to God's will. As a result it says in this verse, "Now consummate! if it be your will," for its will and appetite are so united with God that it considers the fulfillment of God's will to be its glory.

Yet the sudden flashes of glory and love that appear vaguely in these touches at the door of entry into the soul, and are unable to fit into it because of the narrowness of the earthly house, are so sublime that it would rather be a sign of little love not to try to enter into that perfection and completion of love.

Moreover, a soul is conscious that in the vigor of the Bridegroom's delightful communication the Holy Spirit rouses and invites it by the immense glory he marvelously and with gentle affection places before its eyes, telling it what he told the bride in the Song of Songs. The bride thus refers to this: Behold what my Spouse is saying to me: Arise and make haste, my love, my dove, my beautiful one, and come; for winter is now passed, and the rains are over and gone, and the flowers have appeared in our land; the fig tree has put forth her fruits; the vines in flower have given their fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come; my dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hollow of the wall, show me your face, let your voice sound in my ears, because your voice is sweet and your face beautiful [Sg. 2:10-14]. The soul in a sublime experience of glory feels and understands most distinctly all these things that the Holy Spirit, desiring to introduce it into that glory, shows it in this gentle and tender blaze. Consequently, the soul thus roused answers: "Now consummate! if it be your will." It makes the two requests of the Bridegroom that he taught us in the Gospel: *Adveniat regnum tuum; fiat voluntas tua* [Mt. 6:10].<sup>12</sup> It is like saying: "Now consummate" giving me this kingdom, "if it be your will," according to your will. And that this may be true:

tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!

29. The veil is what impedes so singular an event. It is easy to reach God when all the impediments are removed and the veils that separate the soul from union with him are torn. We can say there are three veils that constitute a hindrance to this union with God and must be torn if the union is to be effected and possessed perfectly by the soul; that is: the temporal veil, comprising all creatures; the natural, embodying the purely natural inclinations and operations; and the sensitive, which consists only of the union of the soul with the body, that is, the sensitive and animal life of which St. Paul speaks: We know that if this our earthly house is dissolved, we have a building of God in heaven [2 Cor. 5:1].

The first two veils must necessarily be torn in order to obtain this union with God in which all the things of the world are renounced, all the natural appetites and affections mortified, and the natural operations of the soul divinized.

All of this was accomplished, and these veils were torn by means of the oppressive encounters of this flame. Through the spiritual purgation we referred to above, the soul tears these two veils completely and is united with God as it here is; only the third veil of this sensitive life remains to be torn. As a result it mentions a veil and not veils, since there is only this one to tear. Because the veil is now so tenuous, thin, and spiritualized through this union with God, the flame is not harsh in its encounter as it was with the other two, but savory and sweet. The soul hence calls it a "sweet encounter"; the sweeter and more savory, the more it seems about to tear through the veil of mortal life.

30. It should be known that the natural death of persons who have reached this state is far different in its cause and mode from the death of others, even though it is similar in natural circumstances. If the death of other people is caused by sickness or old age, the death of these persons is not so induced, in spite of their being sick or old; their soul is not wrested from them unless by some impetus and encounter of love far more sublime than previous ones; of greater power, and more valiant, since it tears through this veil and carries off the jewel, which is the soul.

The death of such persons is very gentle and very sweet, sweeter and more gentle than was their whole spiritual life on earth. For they die with the most sublime impulses and delightful encounters of love, resembling the swan whose song is much sweeter at the moment of death. Accordingly, David affirmed that the death of the saints is precious in the sight of the Lord [Ps. 116:15]. The soul's riches gather together here, and its rivers of love move on to enter the sea, for these rivers, because they are blocked, become so vast that they themselves resemble seas. The just one's first treasures, and last, are heaped together as company for the departure and going off to the kingdom, while praises are heard from the ends of the earth, which, as Isaiah says, are the glory of the just one [Is. 24:16].

31. The soul, then, conscious of the abundance of its enrichment, at the time of these glorious encounters feels to be almost at the point of departing for complete and perfect possession of its kingdom, for it knows that it is pure, rich, full of virtues, and prepared for such a kingdom. God permits it in this state to see its beauty, and he entrusts to it the gifts and virtues he has bestowed; for everything is converted into love and praises, and it has no touch of presumption or vanity since it no longer bears the leaven of imperfection that corrupts the mass [1 Cor. 5:6; Gal. 5:9]. Since it is aware that nothing is wanting other than to tear the weak veil of this natural life, in which it feels the entanglement, hindrance, and captivity of its freedom, and since it desires to be dissolved and to be with Christ [Phil. 1:23], it laments that a life so weak and base impedes another so mighty and sublime, and asks that the veil be torn, saying: "Tear through the veil of this sweet encounter!"

32. There are three reasons for the term "veil": first, because of the union between the spirit and the flesh; second, because this union separates the soul from God; third, because a veil is not so thick and opaque that a brilliant light cannot shine through it; and in this state the bond seems to be so tenuous a veil, since it is now very spiritual, thin, and luminous, that it does not prevent the divinity from vaguely appearing through it. Since the soul perceives the power of the other life, it is conscious of the weakness of this one and that the veil is of delicate fabric, as thin as a spider's web; in David's words: Our years shall be considered as the spider [Ps. 90:9]. And this life is even much less in the eyes of persons thus exalted, for, since they have God's view of things, they regard them as God does, in whose sight, as David also declares, a thousand years are as yesterday, which is past [Ps. 89:4], and according to Isaiah, all nations are as though they were not [Is. 40:17]. These things carry the same weight in the soul's view: All things are nothing to it, and it is nothing in its own eyes; God alone is its all.<sup>13</sup>

33. The reason it begs that the veil be torn and not cut or destroyed is noteworthy, for there does not seem to be much difference. We can offer four reasons.

First, we use this term for the sake of speaking more appropriately, since tearing is more proper to this encounter than cutting or destroying.

Second, because love is the friend of the power of love and of the strong and impetuous touch, exercised more in tearing than in cutting and destroying.

Third, because love desires the act to be very brief and quick. The strength and power of the act is commensurate with its brevity and spirituality, for virtue when united is stronger than when scattered. And love is introduced as form is introduced into matter; it is done in an instant, and until then there is no act but only the dispositions toward it. Spiritual acts are produced instantaneously in the soul because God infuses them. But those the soul makes of itself can better be referred to as dispositive acts by means of successive desires and affections, which only become perfect acts of love or contemplation, as I say, when God sometimes forms and perfects them very quickly in the spirit. As a result the Wise Man affirmed that the end of prayer is better than the beginning [Eccl. 7:9], and it is commonly quoted that the short prayer pierces the heavens.<sup>14</sup> A person already disposed can make many acts in a short time, acts far more intense than can be made in a long time by someone undisposed; and, by being so fully disposed, such a person usually remains for a long time in an act of love or contemplation. With one who is not disposed, all is spent in preparing the spirit, and even then the fire usually holds back without entering the wood, either because of excessive dampness of the wood or

lack of sufficient heat to dispose it, or for both reasons. But in the prepared soul the act of love enters immediately, for at each touch the spark catches fire in the dry tinder, and thus the enamored soul desires the brevity of tearing more than the delay involved in cutting or destroying.

The fourth reason is that the veil of this life is done away with more quickly; cutting or destroying requires greater care since one must wait for the object to be prepared or ready, or for some other reason; whereas if one tears it there is no waiting, it seems to me, for this readiness or for anything of the sort.

34. The enamored soul desires this tearing so it may suffer no delay by waiting for its life to be destroyed naturally, or cut off at such and such a time. Both the force of love and the disposition the soul sees in itself make it desire and beg that the veil of life be torn immediately by a supernatural encounter and impetus of love.

A person having reached this stage knows full well that it is characteristic of God to take to himself, before their time, souls that love him ardently, perfecting them in a short while by means of that love, which in any event they would have gained at their own pace. This is what the Wise Man said: He pleased God and was loved; and living among sinners he was translated and carried away lest evil should change his understanding or affection deceive his soul. Perfected in a short time, he fulfilled a long time. Because his soul was pleasing to God, he therefore made haste to take him out of the midst, and so on [Wis. 4:10-11, 13-14]. These words are the words of the Wise Man in which it will be seen how rightly and adequately the soul uses the expression "tear through," for the Holy Spirit uses the words "carry away" and "make haste," which indicate something apart from all delay. God's making haste signifies the haste by which he perfected in a short time the love of the just one, and "carry away" refers to a premature death.

It is vital for individuals to make acts of love in this life so that in being perfected in a short time they may not be detained long, either here on earth or in the next life, before seeing God.<sup>15</sup>

35. Let us see now why it calls this inner assault of the Spirit an encounter rather than something else. The reason is that when the soul feels in God an infinite longing, as we said, for the ending of its life and this wish goes unfulfilled since the time of its perfection has not arrived, it is aware that he produces these divine and glorious assaults in the manner of encounters so as to perfect it and raise it out of the flesh. Since their purpose is to purify it and draw it out of the flesh, they are indeed encounters, by which he ever penetrates and deifies the substance of the soul, absorbing it above all being into his own being.

And the cause of this absorption is that he vigorously encountered and transported it in the Holy Spirit, whose communications are impetuous when they are fervent, as is this encounter. Because the soul tastes God in a living way in this encounter, it calls it sweet; not because many other touches and encounters received in this state are not sweet but because of its eminence over all others. God grants this, as we said, in order soon to loose and glorify it. Whereon it acquires the courage to entreat: "Tear through the veil," and so on.

36. To sum up the entire stanza now, it is like saying: O flame of the Holy Spirit that so intimately and tenderly pierces the substance of my soul and cauterizes it with your glorious ardor! Previously my requests did not reach your ears, when, in the anxieties and weariness of love in which my sense and my spirit suffered because of considerable weakness, impurity, and lack of strong love, I was praying that you loose me and bring me to yourself because my soul longed for you, and impatient love did not allow me to be so conformed to the conditions of this life in which you desired me still to live. The previous impulses of love were not enough, because they did not have sufficient quality for the attainment of my desire; now I am so fortified in love that not only do my sense and spirit no longer faint in you, but my heart and my flesh, reinforced in you, rejoice in the living God [Ps. 84:2], with great conformity between the sensory and spiritual parts. What you desire me to ask for, I ask for; and what you do not desire, I do not desire, nor can I, nor does it even enter my mind to desire it. My petitions are now more valuable and estimable in your sight, since they come from you, and you move me to make them, and I make them in the delight and joy of the Holy Spirit, my judgment now

issuing from your countenance [Ps. 17:2], that is, when you esteem and hear my prayer. Tear, then, the thin veil of this life and do not let old age cut it naturally, that from now on I may love you with the plenitude and fullness my soul desires forever and ever.

---

[Back to Index](#)

## STANZA 2

O sweet cautery,  
O delightful wound!  
O gentle hand! O delicate touch  
that tastes of eternal life  
and pays every debt!  
in killing you changed death to life.

### Commentary

1. In this stanza the soul proclaims how the three Persons of the Most Blessed Trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, are the ones who effect this divine work of union in it. Thus the hand, the cautery, and the touch are in substance the same. The soul applies these terms to the Persons of the Trinity because of the effect each of the Persons produces. The cautery is the Holy Spirit, the hand is the Father, and the touch is the Son. The soul here magnifies the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, stressing the three admirable favors and blessings they produce in it, having changed its death to life, transforming it in the Trinity.

The first is the delightful wound. This it attributes to the Holy Spirit, and hence calls him a sweet cautery.

The second is the taste of eternal life. This it attributes to the Son, and thus calls him a delicate touch.

The third is transformation, a gift by which all debts are fully paid. This it attributes to the Father and hence calls him a gentle hand.

Although it names the three according to the properties of their effects, it speaks only to one, saying "You changed death to life," because all of them work together; and accordingly it attributes everything to one, and everything to all. The verse is:

O sweet cautery,

2. This cautery, as we mentioned, is the Holy Spirit. For as Moses declares in Deuteronomy, Our Lord God is a consuming fire [Dt. 4:24], that is, a fire of love that, being of infinite power, can inestimably consume and transform into itself the soul it touches. Yet he burns each soul according to its preparation. He will burn one more, another less, and this he does insofar as he desires, and how and when he desires.<sup>1</sup> When he wills to touch somewhat vehemently, the soul's burning reaches such a high degree of love that it seems to surpass that of all the fires of the world, for he is an infinite fire of love. As a result, in this union the soul calls the Holy Spirit a cautery. Since in a cautery the fire is more intense and fierce and produces a more singular effect than it does in other combustibles, the soul calls the act of this union a cautery in comparison with other acts of union, for it is the outcome of a fire so much more aflame than all other fires. Because the soul in this case is entirely transformed by the divine flame, it not only feels a cautery, but has become a cautery of blazing fire.

3. It is a wonderful thing and worth relating that, since this fire of God is so mighty it would consume a thousand worlds more easily than the fire of this earth would burn up a straw, it does not consume and destroy

the soul in which it so burns. And it does not afflict it; rather, commensurate with the strength of the love, it divinizes and delights it, burning gently within it.

And this is so on account of the purity and perfection with which the spirit burns in the Holy Spirit. Similarly, as told in the Acts of the Apostles, this fire came mightily and enkindled the disciples [Acts 2:2-3], who, as St. Gregory affirms, burned interiorly and gently with love.<sup>2</sup> This is the Church's meaning when, as regards the same subject, she says: Fire came from heaven, not burning but shining bright; not devouring but illumining.<sup>3</sup> Since God's purpose in granting these communications is to exalt the soul, he does not weary and restrict it but enlarges and delights it; he does not blacken it and convert it to ashes as fire does to coal, but he brightens and enriches it. Hence it calls him a sweet cautery.

4. The happy soul that by great fortune reaches this cautery knows all things, tastes all things, does all it wishes, and prospers; no one prevails before it and nothing touches it. This is the soul of which the Apostle speaks: The spiritual person judges all things and is judged by no one [1 Cor. 2:15]. And again: The spirit searches out all things, even the deep things of God [1 Cor. 2:10]. This is love's trait: to scrutinize all the good things of the Beloved.

5. Oh, the great glory of you who have merited this supreme fire! It is certain that, although it does not consume you - for it has infinite force to consume and annihilate you - it does overwhelmingly consume you in glory. Do not wonder that God brings some souls to this high peak. The sun is distinguished by some of its marvelous effects; as the Holy Spirit says, it burns the mountains (that is, the saints) in three ways [Ecclus. 43:4].

Since this cautery is sweet, then, how delighted will be the soul touched by it! The soul desiring to speak of it does not do so, but keeps the esteem in its heart and only expresses exclamation vocally through the use of "O," saying: "O sweet cautery!"

O delightful wound!

6. Having addressed the cautery, the soul now speaks to the wound caused by the cautery. The cautery was sweet, and the wound must logically conform to the cautery. Thus the wound issuing from a sweet cautery is a delightful wound. Since the cautery is a cautery of love, the wound is a wound of sweet love and is both delightful and sweet.

7. To understand the nature of this wound, which is addressed by the soul, it should be known that the cautery of material fire always leaves a wound where it is applied. And it possesses this property: If applied to a wound not made by fire, it converts it into a wound caused by fire. Whether a soul is wounded by other wounds of miseries and sins or whether it is healthy, this cautery of love immediately effects a wound of love in the one it touches, and those wounds deriving from other causes become wounds of love.

Yet there is a difference between this loving cautery and the cautery produced by material fire. The wound left by material fire is only curable by other medicines, whereas the wound effected by the cautery of love is incurable through medicine; for the very cautery that causes it, cures it, and by curing it, causes it. As often as the cautery of love touches the wound of love, it causes a deeper wound of love, and thus the more it wounds, the more it cures and heals. The more wounded the lover, the healthier the lover is, and the cure caused by love is to wound and inflict wound upon wound, to such an extent that the entire soul is dissolved into a wound of love. And now all cauterized and made one wound of love, it is completely healthy in love, for it is transformed in love.

This is what is understood by the wound of which the soul (all wounded and all healthy) speaks. Even though the soul is all wounded and all healthy, the cautery of love does not fail to fulfill its task, which is to

touch and wound with love. Being wholly delightful and completely sound, the wound brings delight, just as a good doctor usually does. As a result the soul says: "O delightful wound!"

Oh, then, wound, so much more delightful as the fire of love that causes it is higher and more sublime! The Holy Spirit produces it only for the sake of giving delight, and since his will to delight the soul is great, this wound will be great, for it will be extremely delightful.

8. O happy wound, wrought by one who knows only how to heal! O fortunate and choicest wound; you were made only for delight, and the quality of your affliction is delight and gratification for the wounded soul! You are great, O delightful wound, because he who caused you is great! And your delight is great because the fire of love is infinite and makes you delightful according to your capacity and greatness. O, then, delightful wound, so much more sublimely delightful the more the cautery touched the intimate center of the substance of the soul, burning all that was burnable in order to give delight to all that could be delighted!

It is understandable that this cautery and this wound are of the highest degree possible in this state. For there are many other ways God cauterizes the soul that are unlike this one and fail to reach such a degree. For this cautery is a touch only of divinity in the soul, without any intellectual or imaginative form or figure.

9. There is another way of cauterizing the soul; through an intellectual form it usually comes about in a very sublime manner. It will happen that while the soul is inflamed with the love of God, although not with a love of as deep a quality as we mentioned - yet it is fitting that it be so for what I want to say - it will feel that a seraph is assailing it by means of an arrow or dart that is all afire with love. And the seraph pierces and cauterizes this soul that like a red-hot coal, or better a flame, is already enkindled. And then in this cauterization, when the soul is transpierced with that dart, the flame gushes forth fiercely and with a sudden ascent, like the fire in a furnace or an oven when someone uses a poker or bellows to stir and excite it. And being wounded by this fiery dart, the soul feels the wound with unsurpassable delight. Besides being fully stirred in great sweetness by the blowing or impetuous motion of the seraph, in which it feels in its intense ardor to be dissolving in love, it is aware of the delicate wound and the herb (which serves as a keen temper to the dart) as though it were a sharp point in the substance of the spirit, in the heart of the pierced soul.<sup>4</sup>

10. Who can fittingly speak of this intimate point of the wound, which seems to make its mark in the middle of the heart of the spirit, there where the soul experiences the excellence of the delight? The soul feels that the point is like a tiny mustard seed, very much alive and enkindled, sending into its surroundings a living and enkindled fire of love. The fire issuing from the substance and power of that living point, which contains the substance and power of the herb, is felt to be subtly diffused through all the spiritual and substantial veins of the soul in the measure of the soul's power and strength. The soul feels its ardor strengthen and increase and its love become so refined in this ardor that seemingly there flow seas of loving fire within it, reaching to the heights and depths of the earthly and heavenly spheres, imbuing all with love. It seems to it that the entire universe is a sea of love in which it is engulfed, for conscious of the living point or center of love within itself, it is unable to catch sight of the boundaries of this love.

11. There is nothing else to say about the soul's enjoyment here except that it realizes how appropriately the kingdom of heaven was compared in the Gospel to a grain of mustard seed that, by reason of its intense heat, grows into a large tree, despite its being so small [Mt. 13:31-32]. For the soul beholds itself converted into the immense fire of love that emanates from that enkindled point at the heart of the spirit.

12. Few persons have reached these heights. Some have, however, especially those whose virtue and spirit were to be diffused among their children. With respect to the first fruits of the spirit, God accords to founders wealth and value commensurate with the greater or lesser following they will have in their doctrine and spirituality.<sup>5</sup>

13. Let us return to the work of that seraph, for he truly inflicts a sore, and wounds inwardly in the spirit.



Thus, if God sometimes permits an effect to extend to the bodily senses in the fashion in which it existed interiorly, the wound and sore appear outwardly, as happened when the seraph wounded St. Francis. When his soul was wounded with love by the five wounds, their effect extended to the body, and these wounds were impressed on the body, which was wounded just as his soul was wounded with love.<sup>6</sup>

God usually does not bestow a favor on the body without bestowing it first and principally on the soul. Thus the greater the delight and strength of love the wound produces in the soul, so much greater is that produced by the wound outside on the body, and when there is an increase in one there is an increase in the other. This so happens because these souls are purified and established in God, and what is a cause of pain and torment to their corruptible flesh is sweet and delectable to their strong and healthy spirit. It is, then, a wonderful thing, experiencing the pain augmented with the delectable.

Job, with his wounds, clearly beheld this marvel when he said to God: Returning to me, you torment me wondrously [Jb. 10:16]. This is an unspeakable marvel and worthy of the abundance and sweetness God has hidden for them that fear him [Ps. 31:19]: to give one enjoyment of as much savor and sweetness as there is experience of pain and torment.

Nevertheless, when the wound is made only in the soul without being communicated outwardly, the delight can be more intense and sublime. Since the flesh bridles the spirit, when the goods of the spirit are communicated also to the flesh, the flesh pulls the reins, pulls back at the mouth of this swift horse of the spirit, and restrains its wild impetuosity; for if the spirit makes use of its power the reins will break. Yet until the reins are broken the flesh does not fail to oppress the spirit's freedom, as the Wise Man asserts: The corruptible body is a load on the soul, and the earthly dwelling oppresses the spiritual mind which of itself comprehends many things [Wis. 9:15].

14. I say this in order to make it clear that the one who would go to God relying on natural ability and reasoning will not be very spiritual. There are some who think that by pure force and the activity of the senses, which of itself is lowly and no more than natural, they can reach the strength and height of the supernatural spirit. One does not attain to this peak without surpassing and leaving aside the activity of the senses.

Yet it is sometimes quite different when an effect of the spirit overflows into the senses. When this is true, the effect in the senses proceeds from an abundance of spirit, as in the event of the wounds that proceed from the inner strength and appear outwardly. This happened with St. Paul, whose immense compassion for the sufferings of Christ redounded in the body, as he explains to the Galatians: I bear the wounds of the Lord Jesus in my body [Gal. 6:17].

15. What we have expounded concerning the cautery and the wound is sufficient. If the picture we have painted of them is true, what, do you think, will be the hand that produces this cautery, and what the touch? The soul reveals this in the subsequent verse more through interjection than by explanation, saying:

O gentle hand! O delicate touch

16. This hand is, as we said,<sup>7</sup> the merciful and omnipotent Father. We should understand that, since it is as generous and bountiful as it is powerful and rich, it gives, when opened to favor the soul, rich and powerful presents. For this reason the soul calls it a gentle hand. It is like saying: O hand, you are as gentle to my soul, which you touch by resting gently, as you would be powerful enough to submerge the entire world if you rested somewhat heavily, for by your look alone the earth trembles [Ps. 104:32], the nations melt and faint, and the mountains crumble! [Hb. 3:6]. Oh, then again, great hand, by touching Job a little bit roughly, you were as hard and rigorous with him [Jb. 19:21] as you are friendly and gentle with me; how much more lovingly, graciously, and gently do you permanently touch my soul! You cause death, and you give life, and no one flees from your hand [Dt. 32:39].

For you, O divine life, never kill unless to give life, never wound unless to heal. When you chastise, your touch is gentle, but it is enough to destroy the world. When you give delight you rest very firmly, and thus the delight of your sweetness is immeasurable. You have wounded me in order to cure me, O divine hand, and you have put to death in me what made me lifeless, what deprived me of God's life in which I now see myself live. You granted this with the liberality of your generous grace, which you used in contacting me with the touch of the splendor of your glory and the figure of your substance [Heb. 1:3], which is your only begotten Son, through whom, he being your substance, you touch mightily from one end to the other [Wis. 8:1]. And your only begotten Son, O merciful hand of the Father, is the delicate touch by which you touched me with the force of your cautery and wounded me.

17. O you, then, delicate touch, the Word, the Son of God, through the delicacy of your divine being, you subtly penetrate the substance of my soul and, lightly touching it all, absorb it entirely in yourself in divine modes of delights and sweetnesses unheard of in the land of Canaan and never before seen in Teman [Bar. 3:22]! O, then, very delicate, exceedingly delicate touch of the Word, so much more delicate for me insofar as, after overthrowing the mountains and smashing the rocks to pieces on Mount Horeb with the shadow of might and power that went before you, you gave the prophet the sweetest and strongest experience of yourself in the gentle breeze [1 Kgs. 19:11-12]! O gentle breeze, since you are a delicate and mild breeze, tell us: How do you, the Word, the Son of God, touch mildly and gently, since you are so awesome and mighty?

Oh, happy is the soul that you, being terrible and strong, gently and lightly touch! Proclaim this to the world! But you are unwilling to proclaim this to the world because it does not know of a mild breeze, and will not experience you, for it can neither receive nor see you [Jn. 14:17]. But they, O my God and my life, will see and experience your mild touch who withdraw from the world and become mild, bringing the mild into harmony with the mild, thus enabling themselves to experience and enjoy you. The more you dwell permanently hidden within them, the more gently you touch them, for the substance of their soul is now refined, cleansed, and purified, withdrawn from every creature and every touch and trace of creature. As a result you hide them in the secret of your face, which is the Word, from human disturbance [Ps. 31:20].

18. O, then again, repeatedly delicate touch, so much stronger and mightier the more you are delicate, since you detach and withdraw the soul from all the other touches of created things by the might of your delicacy, and reserve it for and unite it to yourself alone, so mild an effect do you leave in the soul, that every other touch of all things both high and low seems coarse and spurious. It displeases the soul to look at these things, and to deal with them is a heavy pain and torment to it.

19. It should be known that the breadth and capacity of an object corresponds to its refinement, and the more diffuse and communicative it is, the more it is subtle and delicate. The Word is immensely subtle and delicate, for he is the touch that comes into contact with the soul. The soul is the vessel having breadth and capacity because of its remarkable purity and refinement in this state.

O, then, delicate touch, the more abundantly you pervade my soul, the more substance you have and the greater purity my soul has!

20. It should also be known that the more subtle and delicate the touch, the more delight and gratification it communicates there where it touches; and the less volume, because the Word who grants it is alien to every mode and manner, and free from all the volume of form, figure, and accident that usually encircles and imposes boundaries or limits to the substance. This touch we are discussing is indescribable insofar as it is substantial, that is, from the divine substance.

Finally, then, O Word, indescribably delicate touch, produced in the soul only by your most simple being that, since it is infinite, is infinitely delicate and hence touches so subtly, lovingly, eminently, and delicately,

that tastes of eternal life

---

[Back to Index](#)

## STANZA 2 (21-36)

21. Although that which the soul tastes in this touch of God is not perfect, it does in fact have a certain savor of eternal life, as was mentioned.<sup>8</sup> And this is not incredible if we believe, as we should, that this is a touch of substances, that is, of the substance of God in the substance of the soul. Many saints have attained to this substantial touch during their lives on earth.

The delicateness of delight felt in this contact is inexpressible. I would desire not to speak of it so as to avoid giving the impression that it is no more than what I describe. There is no way to catch in words the sublime things of God that take place in these souls. The appropriate language for the persons receiving these favors is that they understand them, experience them within themselves, enjoy them, and be silent. One is conscious in this state that these things are in a certain way like the white pebble that St. John said would be given to the one who conquers: and on that pebble a new name written, which no one knows but the one who receives it [Rv. 2:17]. Thus one can only say, and truthfully, "that tastes of eternal life."

Although one does not have perfect fruition in this life as in glory, this touch, nevertheless, since it is a touch, tastes of eternal life. As a result the soul tastes here all the things of God, since God communicates to it fortitude, wisdom, love, beauty, grace, goodness, and so on. Because God is all these things, a person enjoys them in only one touch of God, and the soul rejoices within its faculties and within its substance.

22. Sometimes the unction of the Holy Spirit overflows into the body and all the sensory substance, all the members and bones and marrow rejoice, not in so slight a fashion as is customary, but with the feeling of great delight and glory, even in the outermost joints of the hands and feet. The body experiences so much glory in that of the soul that in its own way it magnifies God, feeling in its bones something similar to what David declares: All my bones shall say: God, who is like to you? [Ps. 35:10]. And because everything that can be said of this unction is less than what it is, it is sufficient to say in reference to both the bodily and the spiritual experience, "that tastes of eternal life."

and pays every debt!

23. The soul affirms this because in the taste of eternal life, which it here enjoys, it feels the reward for the trials it passed through in order to reach this state. It feels not only that it has been compensated and satisfied justly but that it has been rewarded exceedingly. It thoroughly understands the truth of the promise made by the Bridegroom in the Gospel that he would repay a hundredfold [Mt. 19:29]. It has endured no tribulation or penance or trial to which there does not correspond a hundredfold of consolation and delight in this life; and it can truly say: "and pays every debt."

24. To know the nature of these debts for which the soul feels compensated here, it should be noted that ordinarily no one can reach this high state and kingdom of espousal without first undergoing many tribulations and trials. As is said in the Acts of the Apostles, It is necessary to undergo many tribulations to enter the kingdom of heaven [Acts 14:22]. In this state these tribulations are ended; the soul being purified suffers no more.

25. The trials that those who are to reach this state suffer are threefold: trials, discomforts, fears, and temptations from the world; and these in many ways: temptations, aridities, and afflictions in the senses; and

tribulations, darkneses, distress, abandonment, temptations, and other trials in the spirit. In this way a soul is purified in its sensory and spiritual parts, as we mentioned in discussing the fourth verse of the first stanza.

The reason these trials are necessary in order to reach this state is that this highest union cannot be wrought in a soul that is not fortified by trials and temptations, and purified by tribulations, darkneses, and distress, just as a superior quality liqueur is poured only into a sturdy flask that is prepared and purified. By these trials the sensory part of the soul is purified and strengthened, and the spiritual part is refined, purged, and disposed. Since unpurified souls must undergo the sufferings of fire in the next life to attain union with God in glory, so in this life they must undergo the fire of these sufferings to reach the union of perfection. This fire acts on some more vigorously than on others, and on some for a longer time than on others, according to the degree of union to which God wishes to raise them, and according to what they must be purged of.<sup>9</sup>

26. Through these trials in which God places the spirit and the senses, the soul in bitterness acquires virtues, strength, and perfection, for virtue is made perfect in weakness [2 Cor. 12:9] and refined through the endurance of suffering. Iron cannot serve for the artificer's plan, or be adapted to it without fire and the hammer; as Jeremiah says of the fire that gave him knowledge: You have sent fire into my bones and have instructed me [Lam. 1:13]. And Jeremiah also says of the hammer: You have chastised me, Lord, and I was instructed [Jer. 31:18]. Hence Ecclesiasticus says: What can anyone know who is not tried? And the one that has no experience knows little [Ecclus. 34:9-10].

27. And here it ought to be pointed out why so few reach this high state of perfect union with God. It should be known that the reason is not that God wishes only a few of these spirits to be so elevated; he would rather want all to be perfect, but he finds few vessels that will endure so lofty and sublime a work. Since he tries them in little things and finds them so weak that they immediately flee from work, unwilling to be subject to the least discomfort and mortification, it follows that not finding them strong and faithful in that little [Mt. 25:21, 23], in which he favored them by beginning to hew and polish them, he realizes that they will be much less strong in these greater trials. As a result he proceeds no further in purifying them and raising them from the dust of the earth through the toil of mortification. They are in need of greater constancy and fortitude than they showed.

There are many who desire to advance and persistently beseech God to bring them to this state of perfection. Yet when God wills to conduct them through the initial trials and mortifications, as is necessary, they are unwilling to suffer them and they shun them, flee from the narrow road of life [Mt. 7:14] and seek the broad road of their own consolation, which is that of their own perdition [Mt. 7:13]; thus they do not allow God to begin to grant their petition. They are like useless containers, for although they desire to reach the state of the perfect they do not want to be guided by the path of trials that leads to it. They hardly even begin to walk along this road by submitting to what is least, that is, to ordinary sufferings.<sup>10</sup>

We can answer them with Jeremiah's words: If you have grown weary running with footmen, how will you contend with horses? And if you have had quiet in the land of peace, what will you do in the swelling of the Jordan? [Jer. 12:5]. This is like saying: If by the common trials (on foot) that form part of human life, it seemed to you that you were running because there were so many, and you took such short steps, how will you keep up with the horse's stride, which signifies more than ordinary trials for which human strength and speed is not enough? And if you have not wanted to forego the peace and pleasure of your earth, which is your sensuality, or contradict it in anything or stir up a war, I do not know how you will desire to enter the impetuous waters of spiritual tribulations and trials that are deeper.

28. O souls who in spiritual matters desire to walk in security and consolation! If you but knew how much it behooves you to suffer in order to reach this security and consolation, and how without suffering you cannot attain to your desire but rather turn back, in no way would you look for comfort either from God or from creatures. You would instead carry the cross and, placed on it, desire to drink the pure gall and vinegar. You

would consider it good fortune that, dying to this world and to yourselves, you would live to God in the delights of the spirit, and patiently and faithfully suffering exterior trials, which are small, you would merit that God fix his eyes on you and purge you more profoundly through deeper spiritual trials in order to give you more interior blessings.<sup>11</sup>

Those to whom God grants so signal a favor as to tempt them more interiorly must have performed many services for him, have had admirable patience and constancy for his sake, and in their life and works have been very acceptable to him. For he tries them in this way so as to make them advance in gifts and merits, as he did with holy Tobit to whom St. Raphael said: Since you were acceptable to God, he favored you by sending you temptation that he might try you more in order to exalt you more [Tb. 12:13]. After that temptation, all the rest of his life was in joy, as Sacred Scripture says [Tb. 14:4]. We also see in the life of holy Job that once God accepted his works in the sight of the good and evil spirits, he immediately favored him by sending those great trials so that subsequently he could extol him much more. And this he did, multiplying his goods, both spiritual and temporal [Jb. 1-2; 42:10, 12].

29. God acts similarly with those he wishes to lead on by means of what is most beneficial for them. He allows them to be tempted in order to elevate them as high as possible, that is, to union with divine wisdom, which, as David says, is silver examined in the fire, tried in the earth - that is, of our flesh - and purged seven times, which is all the purgation possible [Ps. 12:6]. There is no reason to be detained any longer in order to describe the nature of each of these seven purgations required to attain wisdom, or how the seven degrees of love correspond to them.<sup>12</sup> To the soul this wisdom is still like the silver of which David speaks, however great may be the union; but in the other life it will be like gold to it.

30. People, then, should live with great patience and constancy in all the tribulations and trials God places on them, whether they be exterior or interior, spiritual or bodily, great or small, and they should accept them all as from God's hand as a good remedy and not flee from them, for they bring health. In this matter let them take the counsel of the Wise Man: If the spirit of him who has power descends upon you, do not abandon your place (the place and site of your probation, which is the trial he sends you), for the cure will make great sins cease [Eccl. 10:4]; that is, it will cut off the roots of your sins and imperfections - your evil habits. The combat of trials, distress, and temptations deadens the evil and imperfect habits of the soul and purifies and strengthens it. People should hold in esteem the interior and exterior trials God sends them, realizing that there are few who merit to be brought to perfection through suffering and to undergo trials for the sake of so high a state.

31. Returning to our explanation,<sup>13</sup> the soul knows in this state that everything has ended well and that now sicut tenebrae ejus ita et lumen ejus [Ps. 139:12],<sup>14</sup> and that, as it was a sharer of tribulations, it is now a sharer of consolations and of the kingdom [2 Cor. 1:7]. For God repays the interior and exterior trials very well with divine goods for the soul and body, so there is not a trial that does not have a corresponding and considerable reward. It proclaims this by saying with full satisfaction: "and pays every debt." It thanks God in this verse for having withdrawn it from trials, as David also did in his psalm: What great tribulations you have shown me, many and difficult, and you have freed me from them all, and have brought me back again from the abyss of the earth. You have multiplied your magnificence and turning to me you have comforted me [Ps. 71:20-21].

Before attaining to this state, the soul was like Mordecai who sat at the gates of the palace, wept in the square of Susan over the danger of his life, wore sackcloth, and was unwilling to receive a garment from Queen Esther [Est. 4:1-2, 4] because he had not obtained any reward for the services he had rendered the king or for his fidelity in defending the king's honor and life [Est. 6:3]. One day, just as with Mordecai, the soul is repaid for all its trials and services [Est. 6:10-11], and not only made to enter the palace and stand, clothed in royal garments, before the king, but also accorded the royal crown, scepter, and throne, and possession of the royal ring, so it might do anything it likes and omit anything it does not like in the kingdom of its Bridegroom [Est. 8: 1-2, 15]. Those who are in this state obtain everything they desire. Thus they are not merely paid, but even the Judeans, their enemies, the inordinate appetites, are dead, for these were eliminating the spiritual life

in which it now lives through its faculties and appetites. Hence it subsequently says:

in killing you changed death to life.

32. For death is nothing else than the privation of life, because when life comes no vestige of death remains. Spiritually speaking, there are two kinds of life:

One is beatific, consisting in the vision of God, which must be attained by natural death, as St. Paul says: We know that if this our clay house is dissolved, we have a dwelling place of God in heaven [2 Cor. 5:1].

The other is the perfect spiritual life, the possession of God through union of love. This is acquired through complete mortification of all the vices and appetites and of one's own nature. Until this is achieved one cannot reach the perfection of the spiritual life of union with God, as the Apostle also declares in these words: If you live according to the flesh you shall die; yet if with the spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh you shall live [Rom. 8:13].

33. Let it be known that what the soul calls death is all that goes to make up the old self: the entire engagement of the faculties (memory, intellect, and will) in the things of the world, and the indulgence of the appetites in the pleasures of creatures. All this is the activity of the old life, which is the death of the new spiritual life. The soul is unable to live perfectly in this new life if the old self does not die completely. The Apostle warns: Take off the old self and put on the new self who according to God is created in justice and holiness [Eph. 4:22-24]. In this new life that the soul lives when it has arrived at the perfect union with God here being discussed, all the inclinations and activity of the appetites and faculties - of their own the operation of death and the privation of the spiritual life - become divine.

34. Since every living being lives by its operations, as the philosophers say, and the soul's operations are in God through its union with him, it lives the life of God.<sup>15</sup> Thus it changed its death to life, its animal life to spiritual life.

The intellect, which before this union understood naturally by the vigor of its natural light by means of the natural senses, is now moved and informed by another higher principle of supernatural divine light, and the senses are bypassed. Accordingly, the intellect becomes divine, because through its union with God's intellect both become one.

And the will, which previously loved in a base and deadly way with only its natural affection, is now changed into the life of divine love, for it loves in a lofty way with divine affection, moved by the strength of the Holy Spirit in which it now lives the life of love. By means of this union God's will and the soul's will are now one.

And the memory, which by itself perceived only the figures and phantasms of creatures, is changed through this union so as to have in its mind the eternal years mentioned by David [Ps. 77:5].

And the natural appetite that only had the ability and strength to relish creatures (which causes death), is changed now so that its taste and savor are divine, and it is moved and satisfied by another principle: the delight of God, in which it is more alive. And because it is united with him, it is no longer anything else than the appetite of God.

Finally all the movements, operations, and inclinations the soul had previously from the principle and strength of its natural life are now in this union dead to what they formerly were, changed into divine movements, and alive to God. For the soul, like a true daughter of God, is moved in all by the Spirit of God, as St. Paul teaches in saying that those who are moved by the Spirit of God are children of God himself [Rom. 8:14].<sup>16</sup>

Accordingly, the intellect of this soul is God's intellect; its will is God's will; its memory is the memory of God; and its delight is God's delight; and although the substance of this soul is not the substance of God, since it cannot undergo a substantial conversion into him, it has become God through participation in God, being united to and absorbed in him, as it is in this state. Such a union is wrought in this perfect state of the spiritual life, yet not as perfectly as in the next life. Consequently the soul is dead to all it was in itself, which was death to it, and alive to what God is in himself. Speaking of itself, the soul declares in this verse: "In killing you changed death to life."<sup>17</sup>

The soul can well repeat the words of St. Paul: I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me [Gal. 2:20]. The death of this soul is changed to the life of God. We can also apply the words of the Apostle *absorpta est mors in victoria* [1 Cor. 15:54],<sup>18</sup> as well as those the prophet Hosea speaks in the person of God: O death, I will be your death [Hos. 13:14]. In other words: Since I am life, being the death of death, death will be absorbed in life.

35. The soul, then, is absorbed in divine life, withdrawn from its natural appetites and from all that is secular and temporal; it is brought into the king's cellars where it rejoices in its Beloved, remembering his breasts more than wine, saying: Although I am dark I am beautiful, daughters of Jerusalem [Sg. 1:4-5], for my natural black color was changed into the beauty of the heavenly king.

36. In this state of life so perfect, the soul always walks in festivity, inwardly and outwardly, and it frequently bears on its spiritual tongue a new song of great jubilation in God, a song always new, enfolded in a gladness and love arising from the knowledge the soul has of its happy state. Sometimes it walks in joy and fruition, expressing in its spirit those words of Job: My glory will ever be renewed, and I shall multiply my days as a palm tree [Jb. 29:20,18]. This is equivalent to declaring that God himself, always remaining the same, renews all things. As the Wise Man states: Being ever one in my glory, I will ever renew my glory [Wis. 7:27], that is, I will not let it grow old as it was before. And I will multiply my days as the palm tree, that is, raise my merits heavenward as the palm tree lifts its branches.

The merits of a person in this state are usually remarkable in number and quality, and ordinarily such a soul also sings in its spirit all that David proclaims in the psalm that begins: *Exaltabo te, Domine, quoniam suscepisti me*,<sup>19</sup> and especially in the last two lines: *Convertisti planctum meum in gaudium mihi*, and so on; *conscidisti saccum meum, et circumdedisti me laetitia*,<sup>20</sup> to the end that my glory may sing to you and I may not regret; my Lord, God, I will praise you forever [Ps. 30:1,11-12].

There is no need to be amazed that the soul so frequently walks amid this joy, jubilation, fruition, and praise of God. Besides the knowledge it has of the favors received, it feels in this state that God is so solicitous in regaling it with precious, delicate, and enhancing words, and in extolling it by various favors, that he has no one else in the world to favor nor anything else to do, that everything is for the soul alone. With this feeling it proclaims like the bride in the Song of Songs: *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi* [Sg. 2:16].<sup>21</sup>



## STANZA 3

O lamps of fire!  
in whose splendors  
the deep caverns of feeling,  
once obscure and blind,  
now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,  
both warmth and light to their Beloved.

### Commentary

1. May God be pleased to help me here, for I certainly need his help to explain the deep meaning of this stanza. Readers of this commentary should be attentive for, if they have no experience, it will perhaps seem somewhat obscure and prolix; but if they do have experience, it will perhaps seem clear and pleasant to read.

In this stanza the soul exalts and thanks its Bridegroom for the admirable favors it receives from its union with him. It states that by means of this union it receives abundant and lofty knowledge of God, which is all loving and communicates light and love to its faculties and feeling. These who were once obscure and blind can now receive illumination and the warmth of love, as they do, so as to be able to give forth light and love to the one who illumined them and filled them with love. True lovers are only content when they employ all they are in themselves, all they are worth, have, and receive, in the beloved; and the greater all this is, the more satisfaction they receive in giving it. The soul rejoices on this account because, from the splendors and love it receives, it can shine brightly in the presence of its Bridegroom and give him love. The verse follows:

O lamps of fire!

" 2. First of all it should be known that lamps possess two properties: They transmit light and give off warmth.

To understand the nature of these lamps and how they shine and burn within the soul, it ought to be known that God in his unique and simple being is all the power and grandeur of his attributes. He is almighty, wise, and good; and he is merciful, just, powerful, loving, and so on; and he is the other infinite attributes and powers of which we have no knowledge. Since he is all of this in his simple being, the soul views distinctly in him, when he is united with it and deigns to disclose this knowledge, all these powers and grandeurs, that is: omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, mercy, and so on. Since each of these attributes is the very being of God in his one and only suppositum, which is the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and since each one is God himself, who is infinite light or divine fire, we deduce that the soul, like God, gives forth light and warmth through each of these innumerable attributes. Each of these attributes is a lamp that enlightens the soul and gives off the warmth of love.

3. Insofar as the soul receives the knowledge of these attributes in only one act of this union, God himself is for it many lamps together. They illumine and impart warmth to it individually, for it has clear knowledge of each, and through this knowledge is inflamed in love. By means of all the lamps the soul loves each individually, inflamed by each one and by all together because all these attributes are one being, as we said.

All these lamps are one lamp, which according to its powers and attributes shines and burns like many lamps. Hence the soul in one act of knowledge of these lamps loves through each one and, in so doing, loves through them all together, bearing in that act the quality of love for each one and from each one, and from all together and for all together.

The splendor of this lamp of God's being, insofar as he is omnipotent, imparts light to the soul and the warmth of love of him according to his omnipotence. God is then to the soul a lamp of omnipotence that shines and bestows all knowledge in respect to this attribute. And the splendor of this lamp of God's being insofar as he is wisdom grants the soul light and the warmth of the love of God according to his wisdom. God is then a lamp of wisdom to it. And the splendor of this lamp insofar as he is goodness imparts to the soul light and the warmth of love according to his goodness. God is then a lamp of goodness to it.

He is also to the soul a lamp of justice, fortitude, and mercy, and of all the other attributes that are represented to it together in God. The light communicated to it from all these attributes together is enveloped in the warmth of love of God by which it loves him because he is all these things. In this communication and manifestation of himself to the soul, which in my opinion is the greatest possible in this life, he is to it innumerable lamps giving forth knowledge and love of himself.

4. Moses beheld these lamps on Mount Sinai where, when God passed by, he prostrated himself on the ground and began to call out and enumerate some of them: Emperor, Lord, God, merciful, clement, patient, of much compassion, true, who keeps mercy unto thousands, who takes away iniquities and sins, no one is of himself innocent before you [Ex. 34:6-8]. In this passage it is clear that the greatest attributes and powers that Moses knew there in God were those of God's omnipotence, dominion, deity, mercy, justice, truth, and righteousness; this was the highest knowledge of God. Because love was communicated to him in accord with the knowledge, the delight of love and the fruition he enjoyed there were most sublime.

5. It is noteworthy that the delight received by the soul in the rapture of love, communicated by the fire of the light of these lamps, is wonderful and immense, for it is as abundant as it would be if it came from many lamps. Each lamp burns in love, and the warmth from each furthers the warmth of the other, and the flame of one, the flame of the other, just as the light of one sheds light on the other, because through each attribute the other is known. Thus all of them are one light and one fire, and each of them is one light and one fire.

Immensely absorbed in delicate flames, subtly wounded with love through each of them, and more wounded by all of them together, more alive in the love of the life of God, the soul perceives clearly that this love is proper to eternal life. Eternal life is the aggregation of all goods,<sup>1</sup> and the soul somehow experiences this here and fully understands the truth of the Bridegroom's assertion in the Song of Songs, that the lamps of love are lamps of fire and of flames [Sg. 8:6]. You are beautiful in your steps and shoes, prince's daughter [Sg. 7:1]. Who can relate the magnificence and rareness of your delight and majesty in the admirable splendor and love of your lamps?

6. Sacred Scripture recounts that in times long past one of these lamps went by Abraham and caused him a dark and terrible horror, for the lamp was from the rigorous justice that was to be exercised later on the Canaanites [Gn. 15:12-17]. All these lamps of the knowledge of God illumine you in a friendly and loving way, O enriched soul; how much light and happiness of love will they beget in you, much more than the darkness and horror one lamp produced in Abraham! How remarkable, how advantageous, and how multifaceted will be your delight; in all and from all you receive fruition and love, since God communicates himself to your faculties according to his attributes and powers!

When individuals love and do good to others, they love and do good to them in the measure of their own nature and properties. Thus your Bridegroom, dwelling within you, grants you favors according to his nature. Since he is omnipotent, he omnipotently loves and does good to you; since he is wise, you feel that he loves

and does good to you with wisdom; since he is infinitely good, you feel that he loves you with goodness; since he is holy, you feel that with holiness he loves and favors you; since he is just, you feel that in justice he loves and favors you; since he is merciful, mild, and clement, you feel his mercy, mildness, and clemency; since he is a strong, sublime, and delicate being, you feel that his love for you is strong, sublime, and delicate; since he is pure and undefiled, you feel that he loves you in a pure and undefiled way; since he is truth, you feel that he loves you in truthfulness; since he is liberal, you feel that he liberally loves and favors you, without any personal profit, only in order to do good to you; since he is the virtue of supreme humility, he loves you with supreme humility and esteem and makes you his equal, gladly revealing himself to you in these ways of knowledge, in this his countenance filled with graces, and telling you in this his union, not without great rejoicing: "I am yours and for you and delighted to be what I am so as to be yours and give myself to you."

7. Who, then, will be able to express your experience, O happy soul, since you know that you are so loved and with such esteem exalted? Your belly, which is your will, is like the bride's, similar to a bundle of wheat, covered and surrounded with lilies [Sg. 7:2]. For while you are enjoying together the grains of the bread of life, the lilies, or virtues, surrounding you provide you with delight. These are the king's daughters mentioned by David, who will delight you with myrrh, aloes, and other aromatic spices [Ps. 45:8-9]; for the knowledge of his graces and virtues, which the Beloved communicates to you, are his daughters. You so overflow with these and are so engulfed in them that you are likewise the well of living waters that flow impetuously from Mount Lebanon [Sg. 4:15], that is, from God.

You were made wonderfully joyful according to the whole harmonious composite of your soul and even your body, converted completely into a paradise divinely irrigated, so the psalmist's affirmation might also be fulfilled in you: The impetus of the river makes the city of God joyful [Ps. 46:4].

8. O marvelous thing, that the soul at this time is flooded with divine waters, abounding in them like a plentiful fount overflowing on all sides! Although it is true that this communication under discussion is the light and fire from these lamps of God, yet this fire here is so gentle that, being an immense fire, it is like the waters of life that satisfy the thirst of the spirit with the impetus the spirit desires. Hence these lamps of fire are living waters of the spirit like those that descended on the Apostles [Acts 2:3]; although they were lamps of fire they were clear and pure waters as well. The prophet Ezekiel referred to them in this fashion when he prophesied the coming of the Holy Spirit: I will pour out upon you, God says there, clean waters and will put my spirit in the midst of you [Ez. 36:25-27]. Although it is fire, it is also water. For this fire is represented by the fire of the sacrifice that Jeremiah hid in the cistern: While it was hidden it was water, and when they drew it out for the sacrifice it was fire [2 Mac. 1:19-23].

Thus the spirit of God, insofar as it is hidden in the veins of the soul, is like soft refreshing water that satisfies the thirst of the spirit; insofar as it is exercised in the sacrifice of loving God, it is like living flames of fire. These flames of fire are the lamps of the act of love and of flames that we ascribed above to the Bridegroom according to the Song of Songs: Your lamps are lamps of fire and of flames [Sg. 8:6]. The soul calls them flames here because it not only tastes them like water within itself, but also makes them active, like flames, in the love of God. Since in the communication of the spirit of these lamps, the soul is inflamed and placed in the activity of love, in the act of love, it calls them lamps rather than waters, saying: "O lamps of fire!"

All that can be said of this stanza is less than the reality, for the transformation of the soul in God is indescribable. Everything can be expressed in this statement: The soul becomes God from God through participation in him and in his attributes, which it terms the "lamps of fire."

in whose splendors

9. To understand what these splendors of the lamps are and how the soul is resplendent in them, it should be known that they are the loving knowledge that the lamps of God's attributes give forth from themselves to

the soul. United with them in its faculties, the soul is also resplendent like them, transformed in loving splendors.

This illumination from the splendors, in which the soul shines brightly with the warmth of love, is not like that produced by material lamps that through their flames shed light round about them, but like the illumination that is within the very flames, for the soul is within these splendors. As a result it says, "in whose splendors," that is, within the splendors; and it does not merely mean "within" but, as we pointed out, it means transformed in them. The soul is like the air within the flame, enkindled and transformed in the flame, for the flame is nothing but enkindled air. The movements and splendors of the flame are not from the air alone or from the fire of which the flame is composed, but from both air and fire. And the fire causes the air, which it has enkindled, to produce these same movements and splendors.

10. We can consequently understand how the soul with its faculties is illumined within the splendors of God. The movements of these divine flames, which are the flickering and flaring up we have mentioned,<sup>2</sup> are not produced by the soul alone that is transformed in the flames of the Holy Spirit, nor does the Holy Spirit produce them alone, but they are the work of both the soul and him since he moves it in the manner that fire moves the enkindled air. Thus these movements of both God and the soul are not only splendors, but also glorifications of the soul.

These flames and their activity are the happy festivals and games that the Holy Spirit inspires in the soul, as we said in the commentary on verse 2 of the first stanza. It seems in these that he is always wanting to bestow eternal life and transport it completely to perfect glory by bringing it into himself. All the gifts, first and last, great and small, that God grants to the soul, he always grants in order to lead it to eternal life. In the same way, the flame flickers and flares together with the enkindled air in order to bring the air with itself to the center of its sphere, and it produces all these movements in order to persist in bringing the air nearer itself. As the flame does not carry the air away, because the air is in its own sphere, so too, although these movements of the Holy Spirit are most efficacious in absorbing the soul in sublime glory, they do not do so completely until the time comes for it to depart from the sphere of the air of this carnal life and enter into the center of the spirit of the perfect life in Christ.

11. Let it be known that these motions are motions of the soul more than of God, for God does not move. These glimpses of glory given to the soul are in God stable, perfect, continuous, and constantly serene. Afterward this will also be true of the soul. There will be no change as to more or less and no intrusion of these movements; it will see distinctly how, although here below God seemingly moved within it, he does not in himself move, just as fire does not move when in its center; and it will see how it experienced this movement and flaring of the flame because it was not perfect in glory.

12. By what was said and what we shall now say it will be more plainly understood how excellent the splendors of these lamps are, for by another name they are called "overshadowings." To understand this expression, it should be known that an overshadowing is the equivalent of casting a shadow; and casting a shadow is similar to protecting, favoring, and granting graces. For when a person is covered by a shadow, it is a sign that someone else is nearby to protect and favor. As a result the Angel Gabriel called the conception of the Son of God, that favor granted to the Virgin Mary, an overshadowing of the Holy Spirit: The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you [Lk. 1:35]

13. For a clear understanding of the nature of this casting of the shadow of God or these overshadowings of great splendor, which is all the same, it should be observed that everything has and makes a shadow according to its size and its properties. If an object is opaque and dark, it makes a dark shadow; if it is transparent and delicate its shadow is transparent and delicate. Thus the shadow of a dark object amounts to another darkness in the measure of the darkness of the object, and the shadow of something bright amounts to something else that is bright according to the brightness of the object.

14. Since the virtues and attributes of God are enkindled and resplendent lamps, they cannot but touch the soul by their shadows, since, as we said, they are so close to it. These shadows must also be enkindled and resplendent in the measure of the splendor of the lamps that make them, and thus they will be splendors. As a result the shadow that the lamp of God's beauty casts over the soul will be another beauty according to the measure and property of God's beauty; and the shadow that fortitude casts over it will amount to another fortitude commensurate with God's; and the shadow of God's wisdom on it will be another wisdom corresponding to God's wisdom; and so on with the other lamps. To express it better: We have the very wisdom and the very beauty and the very fortitude of God in shadow, because the soul here cannot comprehend God perfectly. Since the shadow is so formed by God's size and properties that it is God himself in shadow, the soul knows well the excellence of God.

15. What, then, will be the shadows of the grandeurs of his virtues and attributes that the Holy Spirit casts on the soul? For he is so close to it that his shadows not only touch but unite it with these grandeurs in their shadows and splendors, so that it understands and enjoys God according to his property and measure in each of the shadows. For it understands and enjoys the divine power in the shadow of omnipotence; and it understands and enjoys the divine wisdom in the shadow of divine wisdom; and it understands and enjoys the infinite goodness in the shadow of infinite goodness that surrounds it, and so on. Finally, it enjoys God's glory in the shadow of his glory. All this occurs in the clear and enkindled shadows of those clear and enkindled lamps. And these lamps are within the one lamp of the undivided and simple being of God, which is actually resplendent in all these ways.<sup>3</sup>

16. Oh, then, what will be the soul's experience in the knowledge and communication of the figure that Ezekiel beheld in the animal with four faces and in the wheel with four wheels [Ez. 1:5, 15]? He saw how it resembled lamps and burning coal [Ez. 1:13]; and he beheld the wheel, which is God's wisdom, full of eyes within and without, which represent the divine knowledge and the splendors of its powers [Ez. 1:18]; and he heard in his spirit the sound it made in passing, which was like the sound of a multitude, an army, which signifies God's countless grandeurs, which the soul knows distinctly here through the sound of his passing by it only once [Ez. 1:24]; and finally the prophet enjoyed that sound of the beating of its wings, which he asserted was like the sound of many waters and of the most high God, meaning here the force of the divine waters [Ez. 1:24]. These waters assail the soul by the fluttering of the Holy Spirit in the flame of love, gladdening it so it enjoys God's glory in likeness and shadow. For this prophet also said that the vision of that animal and wheel was a likeness of the Lord's glory [Ez. 1:28].

Who can express how elevated this happy soul feels here, how exalted, how much admired in holy beauty? Conscious of being so abundantly assailed by the waters of these divine splendors, it realizes that the eternal Father has generously granted it the upper and lower watery land, as did Achsah's father in response to her sigh [Jos. 15:17-19]. For these waters irrigate both the soul and the body, that is, the higher and lower parts of the soul.

17. O wonderful excellence of God! Since the lamps of the divine attributes are one simple being and are enjoyed only in him, they are seen and enjoyed distinctly, each one as enkindled as the other and each substantially the other. O abyss of delights! You are so much more abundant the more your riches are concentrated in the infinite unity and simplicity of your unique being, where one attribute is so known and enjoyed as not to hinder the perfect knowledge and enjoyment of the other; rather, each grace and virtue within you is a light for each of your other grandeurs. By your purity, O divine Wisdom, many things are beheld in you through one. For you are the deposit of the Father's treasures, the splendor of the eternal light, the unspotted mirror and image of his goodness [Wis. 7:26], in whose splendors

the deep caverns of feeling.

18. These caverns are the soul's faculties: memory, intellect, and will. They are as deep as the boundless goods of which they are capable since anything less than the infinite fails to fill them. From what they suffer when they are empty, we can gain some knowledge of their enjoyment and delight when they are filled with God, since one contrary sheds light on the other.

In the first place, it is noteworthy that when these caverns of the faculties are not emptied, purged, and cleansed of every affection for creatures, they do not feel the vast emptiness of their deep capacity. Any little thing that adheres to them in this life is sufficient to so burden and bewitch them that they do not perceive the harm or note the lack of their immense goods, or know their own capacity.

It is an amazing thing that the least of these goods is enough so to encumber these faculties, capable of infinite goods, that they cannot receive these infinite goods until they are completely empty, as we shall see. Yet when these caverns are empty and pure, the thirst, hunger, and yearning of the spiritual feeling is intolerable. Since these caverns have deep stomachs, they suffer profoundly; for the food they lack, which as I say is God, is also profound.

And this feeling that is so intense commonly occurs toward the end of the illumination and purification, just before the attainment of union, where a person is then satisfied. Since the spiritual appetite is emptied and purged of every creature and affection for creatures, and since it has lost its natural quality and is adapted to the divine, and since its void is disposed and the divine is not communicated to it in union with God, the pain of this void and the thirst are worse than death, especially when a divine ray appears vaguely as though through some crevices and is not communicated to the soul. These are the ones who suffer with impatient love, for they cannot remain long without either receiving or dying.<sup>4</sup>

19. In regard to the first cavern - the intellect - its void is a thirst for God. This thirst is so intense when the intellect is disposed that David compares it to the thirst of the hart. Such thirst, they say, is so vehement that David could find none greater for his comparison: As the hart pants for the fountain of waters, so does my soul long for you, O God [Ps. 42:2]. This thirst is for the waters of God's wisdom, the object of the intellect.

20. The second cavern is the will, and its void is a hunger for God so intense that it makes the soul faint, as David also affirms: My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord [Ps. 84:2]. This hunger is for the perfection of love after which the soul aims.

21. The third cavern is the memory, and its void is a yearning and melting away of the soul for the possession of God, as Jeremiah notes: *Memoria memor ero et tabescet in me anima mea*, that is: With the memory I will be mindful and will remember him often, and my soul will melt within me. Thinking these things over in my heart I shall live in the hope of God [Lam. 3:20-21].

22. The capacity of these caverns is deep because the object of this capacity, namely God, is profound and infinite. Thus in a certain fashion their capacity is infinite, their thirst is infinite, their hunger is also deep and infinite, and their languishing and suffering are infinite death. Although the suffering is not as intense as is the suffering of the next life, yet the soul is a living image of that infinite privation, since it is in a certain way disposed to receive its plenitude. This suffering, however, is of another quality because it lies within the recesses of the will's love; and love is not what alleviates the pain, since the greater the love, so much more impatient are such persons for the possession of God, for whom they hope at times with intense longing.

23. Yet - may the Lord help me - since it is true that when the soul desires God fully, it then possesses him whom it loves, as St. Gregory affirms in commenting on St. John,<sup>5</sup> how does it suffer for want of what it already possesses? In the desire that St. Peter says the angels have for the vision of the Son of God [1 Pt. 1:12] there is no pain or anxiety because they already possess him. Thus it seems that the more the soul desires God the

more it possesses him, and the possession of God delights and satisfies it. Similarly the angels, in satisfying their desire, delight in possession, for their spirit is ever being filled by the object of their desire without the disgust of being satiated. Since there is no disgust, they are always desiring; and they do not suffer, for they have possession. As a result it seems that the greater the soul's desire, the greater will be its satisfaction and delight rather than its suffering and pain.

24. In this matter it is worth noting the difference between the possession of God through grace in itself and the possession of him through union, for one lies in loving and the other lies also in communicating. The difference resembles that between betrothal and marriage.

In betrothal there is only a mutual agreement and willingness between the two, and the bridegroom graciously gives jewels and ornaments to his betrothed. But in marriage there is also a communication and union between the persons. Although the bridegroom sometimes visits the bride in the betrothal and brings her presents, as we said, there is no union of persons, nor does this fall within the scope of betrothal.

Likewise, when the soul has reached such purity in itself and its faculties that the will is very pure and purged of other alien satisfactions and appetites in the inferior and superior parts, and has rendered its "yes" to God concerning all of this, since now God's will and the soul's are one through their own free consent, then the soul has attained possession of God insofar as this is possible by way of the will and grace. And this means that in the "yes" of the soul, God has given the true and complete "yes" of his grace.

---

[Back to Index](#)

## STANZA 3 (25-46)

25. This is a high state of spiritual betrothal between the soul and the Word, in which the Bridegroom favors it and frequently pays it loving visits wherein it receives wonderful delight. Yet these delights are not comparable to those of marriage, for these are preparations for the union of marriage. Although it is true that this betrothal occurs in the soul that is greatly purified of every affection for creatures - for the spiritual betrothal is not wrought until this comes to pass - the soul still needs other positive preparations from God. It needs his visits and gifts by which he purifies, beautifies, and refines it further so it might be suitably prepared for so lofty a union.

This preparation takes time, for some more than for others, since God carries out this work according to the mode of the soul.<sup>6</sup> This is typified in those young maidens chosen by King Ahasuerus. Although he had already brought them out of their countries and the house of their fathers, they had still to wait a year, even in the palace, before approaching the king's bed. For half of the year they were prepared by means of certain ointments of myrrh and other spices, and for the remaining half by other, more precious ointments. After this they went to the king's bed [Est. 2:3, 12].

26. During this time of the betrothal and expectation of marriage and the anointings of the Holy Spirit, when the ointments preparatory for union with God are more sublime, the anxieties of the caverns of the soul are usually extreme and delicate. Since these ointments are a more proximate preparation for union with God (for they are more closely related to God and consequently lure the soul and make it relish him more delicately), the desire for him becomes more refined and profound - and the desire for God is the preparation for union with him.

27. Oh, what an excellent place this is to advise souls on whom God bestows these delicate unctions to watch what they are doing, and into whose hands they are committing themselves, that they might not turn back! This does not pertain to our subject, yet the compassion and grief that come to my heart on seeing souls fall back (not only by hindering the anointings so there can be no progress from them but even by losing their effects) is so great that I do not think it improper here to advise them about what they should do to avoid such harm. Even though we may be somewhat detained before returning to our subject, for I plan to return to it soon, this will all help toward understanding the property of these caverns. Since this advice is very necessary, not only for all those who advance so prosperously but also for all others who seek their Beloved, I want to speak of it.<sup>7</sup>

28. In the first place it should be known that if anyone is seeking God, the Beloved is seeking that person much more. And if a soul directs to God its loving desires, which are as fragrant to him as the pillar of smoke rising from the aromatic spices of myrrh and incense [Sg. 3:6], God sends it the fragrance of his ointments by which he draws it and makes it run after him [Sg. 1:3], and these are his divine inspirations and touches. As often as these inspirations and touches are his, they are always bound and regulated by the perfection of his law and of faith. It is by means of this perfection that a person must always draw closer to him. Thus it should be understood that the desire for himself that God grants in all his favors of unguents and fragrant anointings is a preparation for other more precious and delicate ointments, made more according to the quality of God, until the soul is so delicately and purely prepared that it merits union with him and substantial transformation in all its faculties.

29. The soul, then, should advert that God is the principal agent in this matter. He acts as guide of the



blind, leading it by the hand to the place it knows not how to reach (to supernatural things of which neither its intellect nor will nor memory can know the nature). It should use all its principal care in watching so as not to place any obstacle in the way of God, its guide on this road ordained for it by him according to the perfection of his law and of the faith, as we said.

It can cause this obstacle by allowing itself to be led by another blind guide. There are three blind guides who can draw it off the road: the spiritual director, the devil, and the soul itself. So the soul may understand how this happens, we will briefly discuss each of these blind guides.

30. As regards the first, it is very important that individuals, desiring to advance in recollection and perfection, take care into whose hands they entrust themselves, for the disciple will become like the master, and as is the father so will be the son. Let them realize that for this journey, especially its most sublime parts (and even for the intermediate parts), they will hardly find a guide accomplished as to all their needs, for besides being learned and discreet, a director should have experience. Although the foundation for guiding a soul to spirit is knowledge and discretion, directors will not succeed in leading the soul onward in it when God bestows it, nor will they even understand it if they have no experience of what true and pure spirit is.

31. As a result, many spiritual masters cause great harm to a number of souls; not understanding the ways and properties of the spirit, they ordinarily make souls lose the unction of these delicate ointments with which the Holy Spirit anoints and prepares them for himself, and they instruct them in other inferior ways, serviceable only to beginners, which they themselves have used or read of somewhere. Knowing no more than what pertains to beginners - and please God they would even know this much - they do not wish to permit souls to pass beyond these beginnings and these discursive and imaginative ways (even though God may desire to lead them on). Thus they do not let them go beyond their natural capacity, but through their natural capacity souls cannot make much progress.

32. For a better understanding of this beginner's stage, it should be known that the practice of beginners is to meditate and make acts and discursive reflection with the imagination. Individuals in this state should be given matter for meditation and discursive reflection, and they should by themselves make interior acts and profit in spiritual things from the delight and satisfaction of the senses. For by being fed with the relish of spiritual things, the appetite is torn away from sensual things and weakened in regard to the things of the world.

But when the appetite has been fed somewhat and has become in a certain fashion accustomed to spiritual things and acquired some fortitude and constancy, God begins to wean the soul, as they say, and place it in the state of contemplation. This occurs in some persons after a very short time, especially with religious; in denying the things of the world more quickly, they accommodate their senses and appetites to God and pass on to the spirit in their activity, God thus working in them. This happens when the soul's discursive acts and meditations cease, as well as its initial sensible satisfaction and fervor, and it is unable to practice discursive meditation as before or find any support for the senses. The sensory part is left in dryness because its riches are transferred to the spirit, which does not pertain to the senses.

Since the soul cannot function naturally except by means of the senses, it is God who in this state is the agent; the soul is the receiver. The soul conducts itself only as the receiver and as one in whom something is being done; God is the giver and the one who works in it, by according spiritual goods in contemplation (which is knowledge and love together, that is, loving knowledge), without the soul's natural acts and discursive reflections, for it can no longer engage in these acts as before.

33. Hence persons at this time should be guided in a manner entirely contrary to the former. If, prior to this, directors suggested matter for meditation and these individuals meditated, now this matter should instead be withheld and they should not meditate. For, as I say, they are unable to do so even though they may want

to; and were they to try they would be distracted instead of recollected. If previously they sought satisfaction, love, and devotion, and found it, now they should neither desire nor seek it; for not only do they fail to procure it through their own diligence but, on the contrary, they procure dryness. Through the activity they desire to carry on with the senses, they divert themselves from the peaceful and quiet good secretly being given to their spirit. In losing one good they do not gain the other, for these goods are no longer accorded through the senses as before.

Therefore directors should not impose meditation on persons in this state, nor should they oblige them to make acts or strive for satisfaction and fervor. Such activity would place an obstacle in the path of the principal agent who, as I say, is God, who secretly and quietly inserts in the soul loving wisdom and knowledge, without specified acts; although sometimes he makes specific ones in the soul for a certain length of time. Thus individuals also should proceed only with a loving attention to God, without making specific acts. They should conduct themselves passively, as we have said, without efforts of their own but with the simple, loving awareness, as when opening one's eyes with loving attention.

34. Since God, then, as the giver communes with individuals through a simple, loving knowledge, they also, as the receivers, commune with God through a simple and loving knowledge or attention, so knowledge is thus joined with knowledge and love with love. The receiver should act according to the mode of what is received, and not otherwise, in order to receive and keep it in the way it is given. For as the philosophers say: Whatever is received is received according to the mode of the receiver.<sup>8</sup>

It is obvious that if persons do not lay aside their natural active mode, they will not receive that good except in a natural mode; thus they will not receive it, but will remain only with their natural act. For the supernatural does not fit into the natural mode, nor does it have anything to do with it. If individuals should, then, desire to act on their own through an attitude different from the passive loving attention we mentioned, in which they would remain very passive and tranquil without making any act unless God would unite himself with them in some act, they would utterly hinder the goods God communicates supernaturally to them in the loving knowledge. This loving knowledge is communicated in the beginning through the exercise of interior purgation, in which the individual suffers, as we said, and afterward in the delight of love.<sup>9</sup>

If as I say - and it is true - this loving knowledge is received passively in the soul according to the supernatural mode of God, and not according to the natural mode of the soul, individuals, if they want to receive it, should be very annihilated in their natural operations, unhampered, idle, quiet, peaceful, and serene, according to the mode of God. The more the air is cleansed of vapors and the quieter and more simple it is, the more the sun illumines and warms it. A person should not bear attachment to anything, neither to the practice of meditation nor to any savor, whether sensory or spiritual, nor to any other apprehensions. Individuals should be very free and annihilated regarding all things, because any thought or discursive reflection or satisfaction on which they may want to lean would impede and disquiet them and make noise in the profound silence of their senses and their spirit, which they possess for the sake of this deep and delicate listening. God speaks to the heart in this solitude, which he mentioned in Hosea [Hos. 2:14], in supreme peace and tranquility while the soul listens, like David, to what the Lord God speaks to it [Ps. 85:8], for he speaks this peace in this solitude.

35. When it happens, therefore, that souls are conscious in this manner of being placed in solitude and in the state of listening, they should even forget the practice of loving attentiveness I mentioned so as to remain free for what the Lord then desires of them. They should make use of that loving awareness only when they do not feel themselves placed in this solitude or inner idleness or oblivion or spiritual listening. So they may recognize it, it always comes to pass with a certain peace and calm and inward absorption.

36. Once individuals have begun to enter this simple and idle state of contemplation that comes about when they can no longer meditate, they should not at any time or season engage in meditations or look for support in spiritual savor or satisfaction, but stand upright on their own feet with their spirit completely detached

from everything, as Habakkuk declared he was obliged to do in order to hear what God spoke to him: I will stand on my watch and fix my foot upon my fortress, and I will contemplate what is said to me [Hb. 2:1]. This is like saying: I will raise my mind above all activity and knowledge belonging to my senses and what they can retain, leaving all below, and will fix the foot of the fortress (my faculties), not allowing these faculties to advance a step as regards their own operation that they may receive through contemplation what God communicates to me; for we have already asserted that pure contemplation lies in receiving.

37. It is impossible for this highest wisdom and language of God, which is contemplation, to be received in anything less than a spirit that is silent and detached from discursive knowledge and gratification. Isaiah speaks of it in these words: Whom will he teach knowledge and whom will God make understand the hearing? And Isaiah replies: Those that are weaned from the milk (that is from satisfaction) and drawn away from the breasts (from particular knowledge and apprehensions) [Is. 28:9].

38. Wipe away, O spiritual soul, the dust, hairs, and stains, and cleanse your eye; and the bright sun will illumine you, and you will see clearly. Pacify the soul, draw it out, and liberate it from the yoke and slavery of its own weak operation, which is the captivity of Egypt (amounting to not much more than gathering straws for baking bricks) [Ex. 5:7-19]. And, O spiritual master, guide it to the land of promise flowing with milk and honey [Ex. 3:8, 17]. Behold that for this holy liberty and idleness of the children of God, God calls the soul to the desert, where it journeys festively clothed and adorned with gold and silver jewels, since it has now left Egypt and been despoiled of its riches, which is the sensory part [Ex. 32:2-3]. Not only this, but the Egyptians are drowned in the sea of contemplation [Ex. 14:27-28], where the Egyptian of sense, not finding a foothold or some support, drowns and thereby frees the child of God, which is the spirit that has emerged from the narrow limits and slavery of the operation of the senses, from its little understanding, its base feeling, and its poor way of loving and being satisfied, that God may give it the sweet manna. Although this manna has all these tastes and savors [Wis. 16:20] with which you desire the soul to be occupied through its own labor, nonetheless, since it is so delicate it melts in one's mouth, it will not be tasted if mingled with some other taste or some other thing.

When a soul approaches this state, strive that it become detached from all satisfaction, relish, pleasure, and spiritual meditations, and do not disquiet it with cares and solicitude about heavenly things or, still less, earthly things. Bring it to as complete a withdrawal and solitude as possible, for the more solitude it obtains and the nearer it approaches this idle tranquility the more abundantly will the spirit of divine wisdom be infused into its soul. This wisdom is loving, tranquil, solitary, peaceful, mild, and an inebriator of the spirit, by which the soul feels tenderly and gently wounded and carried away, without knowing by whom or from where or how. The reason is that this wisdom is communicated without the soul's own activity.

39. And a little of this that God works in the soul in this holy idleness and solitude is an inestimable good, a good much greater at times than a soul or its director can imagine. And although one is not always so clearly conscious of it, it will in due time shed its light. The least that a person can manage to feel is a withdrawal and an estrangement as to all things, sometimes more than at other times, accompanied by an inclination toward solitude and a weariness with all creatures and with the world, in the gentle breathing of love and life in the spirit. Everything not included in this estrangement becomes distasteful, for, as they say, once the spirit has tasted, all flesh becomes bitter.<sup>10</sup>

40. Yet the blessings this silent communication and contemplation impress on the soul, without its then experiencing them, are inestimable, as I say. They are most hidden unctions of the Holy Spirit and hence most delicate; they secretly fill the soul with spiritual riches, gifts, and graces. Since it is God who grants them, he does so in no other manner than as God.

41. Because of the refined quality and purity of these delicate and sublime anointings and shadings of the Holy Spirit, neither the soul nor its director understands them; only he who bestows them in order to be more pleased with the soul comprehends them. Individuals can with the greatest ease disturb and hinder these

anointings by no more than the least act they may desire of their memory, intellect, or will; or by making use of their senses, appetite, and knowledge, or their own satisfaction and pleasure. This is all seriously harmful and a great sorrow and pity.

42. Oh, it is a serious and regrettable situation that even though this interfering with these holy unctions seems to cause hardly any damage at all, the harm done is greater and worthy of deeper sorrow and compassion than the harm done in the disturbance and ruin of many other ordinary souls who are not in the position to receive such sublime adornment and shadings! Were a portrait of extremely delicate workmanship touched over with dull and harsh colors by an unpolished hand, the destruction would be worse, more noticeable, and a greater pity than if many other portraits of less artistry were effaced. Who will succeed in repairing that delicate painting of the Holy Spirit once it is marred by a coarse hand?

43. Although this damage is beyond anything imaginable, it is so common and frequent that scarcely any spiritual director will be found who does not cause it in souls God is beginning to recollect in this manner of contemplation. How often is God anointing a contemplative soul with some very delicate unguent of loving knowledge, serene, peaceful, solitary, and far withdrawn from the senses and what is imaginable, as a result of which it cannot meditate or reflect on anything, or enjoy anything heavenly or earthly (since God has engaged it in that lonely idleness and given it the inclination to solitude), when a spiritual director will happen along who, like a blacksmith, knows no more than how to hammer and pound with the faculties. Since hammering with the faculties is this director's only teaching, and he knows no more than how to meditate, he will say: "Come, now, lay aside these rest periods, which amount to idleness and a waste of time; take and meditate and make interior acts, for it is necessary that you do your part; this other method is the way of illusions<sup>11</sup> and typical of fools."

44. Thus, not understanding the stages of prayer or the ways of the spirit, these directors are not aware that those acts they say the soul should make, and the discursive reflection they want it to practice, have already been accomplished. The soul has already reached the negation and silence of the senses and of meditation, and has come to the way of the spirit that is contemplation. In contemplation the activity of the senses and of discursive reflection terminates, and God alone is the agent who then speaks secretly to the solitary and silent soul. These directors fail to observe that if they want to make souls who in this fashion have attained to spirit still walk the path of the senses, they will cause them to turn back and become distracted. If those who have reached the end of their journey continue to walk in order to reach the end, they will necessarily move away from that end, besides doing something ridiculous.

Once individuals, through the activity of their faculties, have reached the quiet recollection that every spiritual person pursues, in which the functioning of these faculties ceases, it would not merely be useless for them to repeat the acts of these same faculties in order to reach this recollection, but it would be harmful, for in abandoning the recollection already possessed they would become distracted.

45. Since these spiritual masters do not understand recollection and spiritual solitude or its properties (in which solitude God applies these sublime unctions to the soul), they superpose or interpose anointings from a lower spiritual exercise, which is the soul's activity, as we said. There is as much difference between what the soul does itself and what it receives from God as there is between a human work and a divine work, between the natural and the supernatural. In one, God works supernaturally in the soul; in the other, only the soul works naturally. What is worse is that by the activity of their natural operations individuals lose inner solitude and recollection and, consequently, the sublime image God was painting within them. Thus all their efforts are like hammering the horseshoe instead of the nail; on the one hand they do harm, and on the other hand they receive no profit.

46. These directors should reflect that they themselves are not the chief agent, guide, and mover of souls in this matter, but the principal guide is the Holy Spirit, who is never neglectful of souls, and they themselves

are instruments for directing these souls to perfection through faith and the law of God, according to the spirit given by God to each one.

Thus the whole concern of directors should not be to accommodate souls to their own method and condition, but they should observe the road along which God is leading one; if they do not recognize it, they should leave the soul alone and not bother it. And in harmony with the path and spirit along which God leads a soul, the spiritual director should strive to conduct it into greater solitude, tranquility, and freedom of spirit. He should give it latitude so that when God introduces it into this solitude it does not bind its corporeal or spiritual faculties to some particular object, interior or exterior, and does not become anxious or afflicted with the thought that nothing is being done. Even though the soul is not then doing anything, God is doing something in it.

Directors should strive to disencumber the soul and bring it into solitude and idleness so it may not be tied to any particular knowledge, earthly or heavenly, or to any covetousness for some satisfaction or pleasure, or to any other apprehension; and in such a way that it may be empty through the pure negation of every creature, and placed in spiritual poverty. This is what the soul must do of itself, as the Son of God counsels: Whoever does not renounce all possessions cannot be my disciple [Lk. 14:33]. This counsel refers not only to the renunciation according to the will of all corporeal and temporal things, but also to the dispossession of spiritual things, which includes spiritual poverty, to which the Son of God ascribes beatitude [Mt. 5:3].

When the soul frees itself of all things and attains to emptiness and dispossession concerning them, which is equivalent to what it can do of itself, it is impossible that God fail to do his part by communicating himself to it, at least silently and secretly. It is more impossible than it would be for the sun not to shine on clear and uncluttered ground. As the sun rises in the morning and shines on your house so that its light may enter if you open the shutters, so God, who in watching over Israel does not doze [Ps. 121:4] or, still less, sleep, will enter the soul that is empty, and fill it with divine goods.

---

[Back to Index](#)

## STANZA 3 (47-67)

47. God, like the sun, stands above souls ready to communicate himself. Let directors be content with disposing them for this according to evangelical perfection, which lies in nakedness and emptiness of sense and spirit; and let them not desire to go any further than this in building, since that function belongs only to the Father of lights from whom descends every good and perfect gift [Jas. 1:17]. If the Lord, as David says, does not build the house, in vain do its builders labor [Ps. 127:1]. And since he is the supernatural artificer, he will construct supernaturally in each soul the edifice he desires, if you, director, will prepare it by striving to annihilate it in its natural operations and affections, which have neither the ability nor strength to build the supernatural edifice. The natural operations and affections at this time impede rather than help. It is your duty to prepare the soul, and God's office, as the Wise Man says, is to direct its path [Prv. 16:9], that is, toward supernatural goods, through modes and ways understandable to neither you nor the soul.

Do not say, therefore: "The soul does not advance, because it is not doing anything."<sup>12</sup> For if it is true that it is not doing anything, I will prove to you that it is accomplishing a great deal by doing nothing. If the intellect empties itself of particular knowledge, natural or spiritual, it advances; and the freer it becomes of particular knowledge and acts of understanding, the further it advances in its journey toward the supreme, supernatural Good.

48. "Or," you will say, "it doesn't understand anything in particular, and thus will be unable to make progress." I reply that, quite the contrary, if it would have particular knowledge it would not advance. The reason is that God transcends the intellect and is incomprehensible and inaccessible to it. Hence while the intellect is understanding, it is not approaching God but withdrawing from him. It must withdraw from itself and from its knowledge so as to journey to God in faith, by believing and not understanding. In this way it reaches perfection, because it is joined to God by faith and not by any other means, and it reaches God more by not understanding than by understanding.

Do not be disturbed on this account; if the intellect does not turn back (which it would do if it were to desire to be occupied with particular knowledge and other discursive reflections), but desires to remain in idleness, it advances. It thereby empties itself of everything comprehensible to it, because none of that is God; as we have said, God does not fit in an occupied heart. In this matter of striving for perfection, not to turn back is to go forward; and the intellect goes forward by establishing itself more in faith. Thus it advances by darkening itself, for faith is darkness to the intellect. Since the intellect cannot understand the nature of God, it must journey in surrender to him rather than by understanding, and thus it advances by not understanding. For its own well-being, the intellect should be doing what you condemn; that is, it should avoid busying itself with particular knowledge, for it cannot reach God through this knowledge, which would rather hinder it in its advance toward him.

49. "Or," you will say, "when the intellect does not understand particular things, the will is idle and does not love (something that must always be avoided on the spiritual road), because the will can only love what the intellect understands." This is true, especially in the natural operations and acts of the soul in which the will does not love except what the intellect understands distinctly. But in the contemplation we are discussing (by which God infuses himself into the soul), particular knowledge as well as acts made by the soul are unnecessary. The reason for this is that God in one act is communicating light and love together, which is loving supernatural knowledge. We can assert that this knowledge is like light that transmits heat, for that light also enkindles love. This knowledge is general and dark to the intellect because it is contemplative knowledge, which is a ray of darkness for the intellect, as St. Dionysius teaches.<sup>13</sup>

Love is therefore present in the will in the manner that knowledge is present in the intellect. Just as this knowledge infused by God in the intellect is general and dark, devoid of particular understanding, the love in the will is also general, without any clarity arising from particular understanding. Since God is divine light and love in his communication of himself to the soul, he equally informs these two faculties (intellect and will) with knowledge and love. Since God is unintelligible in this life, knowledge of him is dark, as I say, and the love present in the will is fashioned after this knowledge.

Yet sometimes in this delicate communication God wounds and communicates himself to one faculty more than to the other; sometimes more knowledge is experienced than love, and at other times more love than knowledge; and likewise at times all knowledge is felt without any love, or all love without any knowledge.

This is why I say that when the soul makes natural acts with the intellect, it cannot love without understanding. But in the acts God produces and infuses in it, as he does in these souls, there is a difference; God can communicate to one faculty and not to the other. He can inflame the will with a touch of the warmth of his love even though the intellect does not understand, just as a person can feel warmth from a fire without seeing it.<sup>14</sup>

50. The will often feels enkindled or tenderly moved or captivated without knowing how or understanding anything more particularly than before, since God is ordaining love in it; as the bride declares in the Song of Songs: The king brought me into the wine cellar and set in order charity in me [Sg. 2:4].

There is no reason to fear idleness of the will in this situation. If the will stops making acts of love on its own and, in regard to particular knowledge, God makes them in it, inebriating it secretly with infused love either by means of the knowledge of contemplation or without it, as we just said, these acts are much more delightful and meritorious than the acts the soul makes on its own, just as God, who moves it and infuses this love, is much better.

51. God infuses this love in the will when it is empty and detached from other particular, earthly or heavenly pleasures and affections. Take care, then, to empty the will of its affections and detach it from them. If it does not retrogress through the desire for some satisfaction or pleasure, it advances, even though it experiences nothing particular in God, by ascending above all things to him. Although it does not enjoy God very particularly and distinctly, nor love him in so clear an act, it does enjoy him obscurely and secretly in that general infusion more than it does all particular things, for it then sees clearly that nothing satisfies it as much as that solitary quietude. And it loves him above all lovable things, since it has rejected all the gratifications and pleasures of these things and they have become distasteful to it.

One, therefore, should not be disturbed, for the will makes progress if it cannot dwell on the satisfactions and pleasures of particular acts. For by not turning back in the embrace of something sensible, it goes forward to the inaccessible, which is God; and so it is no wonder if it does not feel him.

To journey to God, the will must walk in detachment from every pleasant thing, rather than in attachment to it. It thus carries out well the commandment of love, which is to love God above all things; this cannot be done without nakedness and emptiness concerning them all.

52. Neither should there be any fear because the memory is void of forms and figures. Since God is formless and figureless, the memory walks safely when empty of form and figure, and it draws closer to God. The more it leans on the imagination, the farther away it moves from God and the more serious is its danger; for in being what he is - unimaginable - God cannot be grasped by the imagination.

53. These spiritual masters, not understanding souls that tread the path of quiet and solitary contemplation, since they themselves have not reached it and do not know what it is to part with discursive meditation, think these souls are idle. They hinder them and hamper the peace of restful and quiet contemplation that God of his own was according them, by making them walk along the path of meditation and imaginative reflection, and perform interior acts. In doing this, these souls find great repugnance, dryness, and distraction; they want to remain in their holy idleness and quiet and peaceful recollection.

Since the senses find nothing to be attached to, take pleasure in, or do in this recollection, these directors also persuade souls to strive for satisfaction and feelings of fervor when they should be counseling the opposite. When these persons cannot accomplish this as before, because the time for such activity has passed and this is not their road, they grow doubly disquieted, thinking that they are lost. Their directors foster this belief in them, cause in them aridity of spirit, and deprive them of the precious anointings God was bestowing on them in solitude and tranquility. This causes serious harm, as I said; and these directors bring them grief and ruin, for on the one hand such persons lose ground, and on the other they suffer a useless affliction.

54. These directors do not know what spirit is. They do a great injury to God and show disrespect toward him by intruding with a rough hand where he is working. It cost God a great deal to bring these souls to this stage, and he highly values his work of having introduced them into this solitude and emptiness regarding their faculties and activity so that he might speak to their hearts, which is what he always desires. Since it is he who now reigns in the soul with an abundance of peace and calm, he takes the initiative himself by making the natural acts of the faculties fail, by which the soul laboring the whole night accomplished nothing [Lk. 5:5]; and he feeds the spirit without the activity of the senses because neither the sense nor its function is capable of spirit.

55. The extent to which God values this tranquility and sleep, or annihilation of sense, is clear in the entreaty, so notable and efficacious, that he made in the Song of Songs: I adjure you, daughters of Jerusalem, by the roes and the harts of the fields, that you stir not up nor awaken my beloved until she please [Sg. 3:5]. He hereby indicates how much he loves solitary sleep and forgetfulness, for he compares it to these animals that are so retiring and withdrawn. Yet these spiritual directors do not want the soul to rest and remain quiet, but want it always to labor and work, so that consequently it does not allow room for God's work and through its own activity ruins and effaces what he is doing. Its activities are like the little foxes that destroy the flourishing vineyard of the soul [Sg. 2:15]. Thus the Lord complains through Isaiah: You have devoured my vineyard [Is. 3:14].

56. Perhaps in their zeal these directors err with good will because they do not know any better. Not for this reason, however, should they be excused for the counsels they give rashly, without first understanding the road and spirit a person may be following, and for rudely meddling in something they do not understand, instead of leaving the matter to one who does understand. It is no light matter or fault to cause a soul to lose inestimable goods and sometimes leave it in ruin through temerarious counsel.

Thus one who recklessly errs will not escape a punishment corresponding to the harm caused, for such a one is obliged to be certain, as is everyone in the performance of duties. The affairs of God must be handled with great tact and open eyes, especially in so vital and sublime a matter as is that of these souls, where there is at stake almost an infinite gain in being right and almost an infinite loss in being wrong.

57. Since, however, you insist that you have some excuse, although I do not see it, at least you cannot hold that they have an excuse who in guiding a soul never let it out of their hands on account of vain considerations of which they are aware.<sup>15</sup> Such directors will not escape punishment for these considerations. For it is certain that since that soul must always advance along the spiritual road on which God is always a help to it, it will have to change its style and mode of prayer and will need another doctrine more sublime than yours, and another spirituality. Not everyone knows all the happenings and stages of the spiritual journey, nor is



everyone spiritually so perfect as to know every state of the interior life in which a person must be conducted and guided. At least directors should not think that they have all the requirements, or that God will not want to lead the soul further on.

Not everyone capable of hewing the wood knows how to carve the statue, nor does everyone able to carve know how to perfect and polish the work, nor do all who know how to polish it know how to paint it, nor do all who can paint it know how to put the finishing touches on it and bring the work to completion. One can do with the statue only what one knows how to do, and when craftsmen try to do more than they know how to do, the statue is ruined.

58. Let us see, then: If you are only a hewer, which lies in guiding the soul to contempt of the world and mortification of its appetites, or a good carver, which consists in introducing it to holy meditations, and know no more, how can you lead this soul to the ultimate perfection of delicate painting, which no longer requires hewing or carving or even relief work, but the work that God must do in it?

It is certain that if you always bind it to your teaching, which is ever of one kind, it will either backslide or fail to advance. What, I ask, will the statue look like if all you do is hammer and hew, which, in the case of the soul, is the active use of the faculties? When will the statue be complete? When or how will it be left for God to paint? Is it possible that all these functions are yours and that you are so perfect the soul will never need any other than you?

59. Granted that you may possess the requisites for the full direction of some soul (for perhaps it does not have the talent to make progress), it is impossible for you to have the qualities demanded for the guidance of all those you refuse to allow out of your hands. God leads each one along different paths so that hardly one spirit will be found like another in even half its method of procedure.<sup>16</sup> For who is there who would become, like St. Paul, all things to all so as to win them all [1 Cor. 9:22]? You tyrannize souls and deprive them of their freedom, and judge for yourself the breadth of the evangelical doctrine. Therefore you endeavor to hold on to your penitents. But what is worse, you may by chance learn that one of them has consulted another (for perhaps you were not the suitable one to consult, or that person was led by God to another so as to learn what you did not teach), and you treat that penitent - I am ashamed to say it - with the very jealous quarrelsomeness we find among married couples. And this is not jealousy for the glory of God, but a jealousy motivated by your own pride and presumption or some other imperfection, for you should not assume that in turning from you this person turned from God.

60. God becomes extremely indignant with such directors and in Ezekiel promises them chastisement: You ate the milk of my flock and you covered yourself with their wool and did not feed my flock; I will seek my flock at your hand, he says [Ez. 34:3, 10].

61. Spiritual masters, then, should give freedom to souls and encourage them in their desire to seek improvement. The director does not know the means by which God may wish to benefit a soul, especially if it is no longer satisfied with the director's teaching. This dissatisfaction is in fact a sign that the director is not helping it, either because God is making it advance by a road different from the one along which it is being led, or because the master has changed style. These masters should themselves counsel this change; all the rest stems from foolish pride and presumption, or some other ambition.

62. Let us leave aside our discussion of this attitude and speak of another more pestiferous trait of these directors or of other worse methods used by them. It will happen that God is anointing some souls with the unctions of holy desires and motives for renouncing the world, changing their way of life, and serving him, with contempt of the world (and God esteems this stage to which he has brought them, because worldly things do not please him), when these directors, by their human rationalizations or reflections singularly contrary to the doctrine of Christ and of his humility and contempt for all things, and by depending on their own interests or

satisfactions, or out of fear where there is no reason to fear, either make matters difficult for these souls or cause them to delay, or even worse try to make them put the thought from their minds. With a spirit not too devout, with little of Christ's meekness, and fully clothed in worldliness, since they do not enter by the narrow gate of life, these directors do not let others enter either.

Our Lord threatens them through St. Luke: Woe to you, for you have taken away the key of knowledge, and you neither enter yourselves nor do you allow others to enter [Lk. 11:52].

These directors are indeed like barriers or obstacles at the gate of heaven, hindering those who seek their counsel from entering. They know that God has commanded them not only to allow and help souls enter but even to compel them to enter, when he says through St. Luke: Make them enter that my house may be filled with guests [Lk. 14:23]. But they, on the contrary, compel them to stay out.<sup>17</sup>

The director is thus a blind guide who can be an obstacle to the life of the soul, which is the Holy Spirit. We discover this to be the case with spiritual masters in the many ways we mentioned, in which some are aware of it and others are unaware. But neither will escape punishment; since this is their duty, they are obliged to be careful and understand what they are doing.

63. The second blind guide who, we said,<sup>18</sup> was capable of thwarting the soul in this kind of recollection is the devil; being blind himself, he desires that the soul be blind too. When the soul is in the loftiest solitudes, receiving the infusion of the delicate unctions of the Holy Spirit insofar as it is alone, despoiled, and withdrawn from every creature and trace of creature, the devil, with great sadness and envy, seeing that the soul is not only enriched but flying along at such a pace that he cannot catch it in anything, strives to intrude in this withdrawal with some clouds of knowledge and sensible satisfaction. This knowledge and satisfaction he gives is sometimes good, so he may feed the soul more and make it revert to particular things and the work of the senses, and make it turn thus to this good knowledge and satisfaction, embrace it, and journey to God leaning upon it.

He consequently distracts it very easily and draws it out of that solitude and recollection in which, as we said, the Holy Spirit is bringing about those secret marvels. Since humans of themselves are inclined toward feeling and tasting, especially if they are seeking something and do not understand the road they are traveling, they easily grow attached to the knowledge and satisfaction provided by the devil and lose the solitude God was providing. Since the soul was doing nothing in that solitude and quiet of the faculties, it thinks that this way is better because it is now doing something. It is a great pity that, in not understanding itself and for the sake of eating a morsel of particular knowledge and satisfaction, the soul impedes God from feeding on it entirely, which God does in that solitude where he places it, since he absorbs it in himself by means of those solitary spiritual anointings.<sup>19</sup>

64. With little more than nothing, the devil causes the gravest harm. He makes the soul lose abundant riches by alluring it with a little bait - as one would lure a fish - out of the simple waters of the spirit, where it was engulfed and swallowed up in God without finding any bottom or foothold. And by this bait he provides it with a prop and drags it ashore so it might find the ground and go on foot, with great effort, rather than swim in the unctions of God, in the waters of Shiloh that flow in silence [Is. 8:6].

The devil considers this so important that it is worth noting that, since he accomplishes more through a little harm caused in these souls than by great damage effected in many others, as we have mentioned, there is hardly anyone walking this path on whom he does not bring serious harm and loss. This evil one establishes himself cautiously at the passageway from sense to spirit, deceiving souls and feeding the sensory part itself, as we said, with sensible things. The soul does not think there is any loss in this; it thus fails to enter into the inner dwelling of the Bridegroom, and remains at the threshold to watch what is happening outside in the sensory part. The devil sees every high thing, says Job [Jb. 41:25], that is, every spiritual height of souls in

order to combat them. If, by chance, some soul enters a sublime recollection in such fashion that the devil cannot distract it in the way we mentioned, he struggles through horrors, fears, bodily pains, or exterior sounds and noises to make it at least advert to sense and to draw it out thereby and divert it from the interior spirit, until being able to do no more he leaves it.

But it is so easy for him to thwart and block the riches of these precious souls that even though he values doing this more than he does ruining many other souls, he still does not esteem it highly because of the ease in which he accomplishes it and the little it costs him.

We can in this sense interpret God's words to Job about him: He will absorb a river and not wonder and he trusts that the Jordan will run into his mouth, which refers to the highest matters of perfection. In his eyes as with a hook he will catch him and with awls pierce his nostrils [Jb. 40:23-24], that is, he will divert the spirit with the points of the knowledge by which he is wounding it; for the air that rushes out of the recollected nostrils that are pierced is scattered in many parts. And further on he says: The rays of the sun will be under him and gold will be strewn under him like mire [Jb. 41:22], for the devil causes illumined souls to lose wonderful rays of divine knowledge and seizes and scatters the precious gold of the divine embellishments.<sup>20</sup>

65. Oh, then, souls, when God is according you such sovereign favors as to lead you by the state of solitude and recollection, withdrawing you from the labors of the senses, do not revert to the senses. Abandon your activity, for if this helped you to deny the world and yourselves when you were beginners, it is a serious obstacle now that God favors you by being himself the agent. God will feed you with heavenly refreshment since you do not apply your faculties to anything, or encumber them, but detach them from everything, which is all you yourself have to do (besides the simple loving attentiveness in the way I mentioned above,<sup>21</sup> that is, when you feel no aversion toward it). You should not use any force except to detach your soul and liberate it, so as not to alter its peace and tranquility.

66. The third blind guide is the soul that, by not understanding itself, disturbs and harms itself. Since it only knows how to act by means of the senses and discursive reflection, it thinks it is doing nothing when God introduces it into that emptiness and solitude where it is unable to use the faculties and make acts; as a result it strains to perform these acts. The soul, therefore, that was enjoying the idleness of spiritual peace and silence, in which God was secretly adorning it, is distracted and filled with dryness and displeasure.

It will happen that while God persists in keeping the soul in that silent quietude, it persists in its desire to act through its own efforts with the intellect and the imagination. It resembles a little boy who kicks and cries, wanting to walk when his mother wants to carry him; thus he neither allows his mother to make any headway nor makes any himself.<sup>22</sup> Or it resembles one who moves a painting back and forth while the artist is at work so either nothing is accomplished or the painting is damaged.

67. Individuals should take note that even though they do not seem to be making any progress in this quietude or doing anything, they are advancing much faster than if they were treading along on foot, for God is carrying them. Although they are walking at God's pace, they do not feel this pace. Even though they do no work with their faculties, they achieve much more than if they did, for God is the agent.

It is no wonder if they do not advert to this, for the senses do not attain to what God effects in the soul at this time; it is done in silence. As the Wise Man says: The words of wisdom are heard in silence [Eccl. 9:17].

A soul, then, should abandon itself into God's hands, and not into its own or those of the other two blind guides. Insofar as it abandons itself to God and does not apply its faculties to anything, it will advance securely.

---

[Back to Index](#)

## STANZA 3 (68-85)

68. Let us return now to the subject of these deep caverns of the faculties of the soul, in which, we said,<sup>23</sup> its suffering is usually intense when God is anointing and disposing it with the most sublime unctions of the Holy Spirit for union with himself.

These anointings are so subtle and delicate that, in penetrating the intimate substance of the soul's depths, they prepare it and give it such savor that the suffering and the fainting of desire in the tremendous void of these caverns is immense.

Hence, if the anointings that prepare these caverns of the soul for the union of the spiritual marriage with God are so sublime, what will be the possession of knowledge, love, and glory of the intellect, will, and memory in this union with God? Certainly the satisfaction, fullness, and delight of these caverns will then correspond to their former hunger and thirst. And the exquisite quality of both the soul's possession and the fruition of its feeling<sup>24</sup> will be in conformity with the delicacy of the preparations.

69. By the "feeling" of the soul, the verse refers to the power and strength the substance of the soul has for feeling and enjoying the objects of the spiritual faculties; through these faculties a person tastes the wisdom and love and communication of God.<sup>25</sup> The soul here calls these three faculties (memory, intellect, and will) "the deep caverns of feeling" because through them and in them it deeply experiences and enjoys the grandeurs of God's wisdom and excellence. It very appropriately calls them the deep caverns of feeling because, since it feels that the deep knowledge and splendors of the lamps of fire fit into them, it knows that its capacity and recesses correspond to the particular things it receives from the knowledge, savor, joy, delight, and so on, of God. All these things are received and seated in this feeling of the soul which, as I say, is its power and capacity for experiencing, possessing, and tasting them all. And the caverns of the faculties administer them to it, just as the bodily senses go to assist the common sense of the phantasy with the forms of their objects, and this common sense becomes the receptacle and archives of these forms.<sup>26</sup> Hence this common sense, or feeling, of the soul, which has become the receptacle or archives of God's grandeurs, is illumined and enriched according to what it attains of this high and enlightened possession.

once obscure and blind,

70. That is, before God enlightened and illumined it. To understand this it should be known that there are two reasons the sense of sight loses its power of vision: either because of obscurity or because of blindness.

God is the light and the object of the soul. When this light does not illumine it, the soul dwells in obscurity even though it may have very excellent vision. When it is in sin or occupies its appetites with other things, then it is blind; and even though God's light may shine on it, because it is blind it does not see its obscureness, which is its ignorance. Before God illumined it by means of this transformation, it was in obscurity and ignorant of so many of God's goods, as the Wise Man says he was before wisdom enlightened him: He shed light on my ignorance [Ecclus. 51:26].

71. Spiritually speaking, it is one thing to be in obscurity and another to be in darkness. To be in darkness, as we said, is to be blind in sin. Yet one can be in obscurity without being in sin, and this doubly: regarding the natural, by not having light or knowledge about certain natural things; and regarding the supernatural, by not having light or knowledge of supernatural things. The soul says here that before reaching this precious union

its feeling was in obscurity concerning both.

Until the Lord said, fiat lux<sup>27</sup>[Gn. 1:3], darkness was over the face of the abyss of the caverns of the soul's feeling [Gn. 1:2]. The more unfathomable and deep-caverned is the feeling, the more profound are its chasms and its darknesses regarding the supernatural, when God who is its light does not illumine it.

Thus it is impossible for it to lift its eyes to the divine light, or even think of doing so, for in never having seen it, it knows not what it is. Accordingly, it will be unable to desire this light; it will rather desire darkness because it knows what darkness is, and will go from darkness to darkness, guided by that darkness. One darkness cannot but lead to another. As David says: The day overflows into the day and the night teaches knowledge to the night [Ps. 19:2]. Thus one abyss calls to the other abyss [Ps. 42:7], that is: An abyss of light summons another abyss of light, and an abyss of darkness calls to another abyss of darkness, each like evoking its like and communicating itself to it.

The light of grace that God had previously accorded this soul (by which he had illumined the eye of the abyss of its spirit, opened its eye to the divine light, and made it pleasing to himself) called to another abyss of grace, which is this divine transformation of the soul in God. In this transformation the eye of the soul's feeling is so illumined and agreeable to God that we can say God's light and that of the soul are one. The natural light of the soul is united with the supernatural light of God so that only the supernatural light is shining; just as the light God created was united to the light of the sun and now only the sun shines even though the other light is not lacking [Gn. 1:14-18].

72. Also, it was blind insofar as it was enjoying something else. The blindness of the rational and superior feeling is the appetite that, like a cataract and cloud, interferes with and hangs over the eye of reason so things present cannot be seen. Insofar as the appetite proposed some satisfaction, the feeling was blind to the grandeurs of the divine riches and beauty on the other side of the cataract. Just as something in front of the eye, no matter how small, is sufficient to obstruct its vision of things before it, no matter how large, so a small appetite and idle act of the soul is enough to impede all these divine grandeurs that stand behind the soul's appetites and gratifications.

73. Oh, who can tell how impossible it is for a person with appetites to judge the things of God as they are! If there is to be success in judging the things of God, the appetites and satisfactions must be totally rejected, and these things of God must be weighed apart from them. For otherwise one will infallibly come to consider the things of God as not of God, and the things that are not of God as of God.

Since that cataract and cloud shrouds the eye of judgment, only the cataract is seen, sometimes of one color, sometimes another, according to the way the cataract appears to the eye. People judge that the cataract is God because, as I say, they see only the cataract that covers the faculty, and God cannot be grasped by the senses. Consequently the appetite and sensory gratifications impede the knowledge of high things. The Wise Man indicates this clearly with these words: The deceitfulness of vanity obscures good things, and the inconstancy of concupiscence overturns the innocent mind [Wis. 4:12], that is, good judgment.

74. Those who are not so spiritual as to be purged of appetites and satisfactions, but still keep in themselves something of the animal self, believe that things most vile and base to the spirit (those closest to the senses, according to which they are still living) are highly important; and those that are loftier and more precious to the spirit (those further withdrawn from the senses) are considered to be of little value and are not esteemed by them. They will even regard them sometimes as foolishness, as St. Paul clearly indicates: The animal self does not perceive the things of God; they are foolishness to it and it cannot understand them [1 Cor. 2:14]. By the animal self he means here the person who still lives with natural appetites and gratifications. Even though some satisfaction overflows from the spirit into the senses, that person has no more than natural appetites who desires to become attached to it. It matters little that the object or cause is supernatural, if the appetite arises naturally and finds its roots and strength in nature. It does not thus cease being a natural

appetite, for it has the very substance and nature it would have were it to deal with a natural object or cause.

75. You will say to me: "Well, it therefore follows that when the soul desires God, it does not desire him supernaturally, and thus its desire will be unmeritorious before God."

I reply that it is true that the soul's desire for God is not always supernatural, but only when God infuses it and himself gives the strength for it. This is far different from the natural desire, and until God infuses the desire there is very little or no merit. Thus when you of your own power have the desire for God, your desire amounts to no more than a natural appetite; neither will it be anything more until God informs it supernaturally. When you of yourself become attached to spiritual things and bound to their savoriness, you exercise your natural appetite and thus you put cataracts before your eyes and become an animal self. You are then able neither to understand nor judge the spiritual self, which is above every natural feeling and appetite.

If you have any further doubts, I know not what to say, except that you reread this and perhaps you will understand. For the substance of the truth has been said, and this is not the place to enlarge on it.

76. This feeling, then, of the soul that was once obscure, without this divine light and blind through its appetites and affections, has now together with the deep caverns of its faculties become not only bright and clear, but like a resplendent light.

now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely,  
both warmth and light to their Beloved.

77. When these caverns of the faculties are so wonderfully and marvelously pervaded with the admirable splendors of those lamps that are burning within, they give forth to God in God with loving glory, besides their surrender to him, these very splendors they have received. Inclined in God toward God, having become enkindled lamps within the splendors of the divine lamps, they render the Beloved the same light and heat they receive. In the very manner they receive it, they return it to the one who gave it, and with the same exquisite beauty; just as the window when the sun shines on it, for it then too reflects the splendors. Yet the soul reflects the divine light in a more excellent way because of the active intervention of its will.

78. "So rarely, so exquisitely," means: in a way rare or foreign to every common thought, every exaggeration, and every mode and manner.

Corresponding to the exquisite quality with which the intellect receives divine wisdom, being made one with God's intellect, is the quality with which the soul gives this wisdom, for it cannot give it save according to the mode in which it was given.

And corresponding to the exquisite quality by which the will is united to goodness is the quality by which the soul gives in God the same goodness to God, for it only receives it in order to give it.

And, no more nor less, according to the exquisite quality by which it knows in the grandeur of God, being united to it, the soul shines and diffuses the warmth of love.

And according to the exquisite quality of the divine attributes (fortitude, beauty, justice, and so on) that the Beloved communicates, is the quality with which the soul's feeling gives joyfully to him the very light and heat it receives from him. Having been made one with God, the soul is somehow God through participation. Although it is not God as perfectly as it will be in the next life, it is like the shadow of God.<sup>28</sup>

Being the shadow of God through this substantial transformation, it performs in this measure in God and

through God what he through himself does in it. For the will of the two is one will, and thus God's operation and the soul's are one. Since God gives himself with a free and gracious will, so too the soul (possessing a will more generous and free the more it is united with God) gives to God, God himself in God; and this is a true and complete gift of the soul to God.

It is conscious there that God is indeed its own and that it possesses him by inheritance, with the right of ownership, as his adopted child through the grace of his gift of himself. Having him for its own, it can give him and communicate him to whomever it wishes. Thus it gives him to its Beloved, who is the very God who gave himself to it. By this donation it repays God for all it owes him, since it willingly gives as much as it receives from him.

79. Because the soul in this gift to God offers him the Holy Spirit, with voluntary surrender, as something of its own (so that God loves himself in the Holy Spirit as he deserves), it enjoys inestimable delight and fruition, seeing that it gives God something of its own that is suited to him according to his infinite being. It is true that the soul cannot give God again to himself, since in himself he is ever himself. Nevertheless it does this truly and perfectly, giving all that was given it by him in order to repay love, which is to give as much as is given. And God, who could not be considered paid with anything less, is considered paid with that gift of the soul; and he accepts it gratefully as something it gives him of its own. In this very gift he loves it anew; and in this re-surrender of God to the soul, the soul also loves as though again.

A reciprocal love is thus actually formed between God and the soul, like the marriage union and surrender, in which the goods of both (the divine essence that each possesses freely by reason of the voluntary surrender between them) are possessed by both together. They say to each other what the Son of God spoke to the Father through St. John: *Omnia mea tua sunt et tua mea sunt et clarificatus sum in eis* (All my goods are yours and yours are mine, and I am glorified in them) [Jn. 17:10]. In the next life this will continue uninterrupted in perfect fruition, but in this state of union it occurs, although not as perfectly as in the next, when God produces in the soul this act of transformation.

Clearly the soul can give this gift, even though the gift has greater entity than the soul's own being and capacity; for those who own many nations and kingdoms, which have more entity than they do as individuals, can give them to whomever they will.

80. This is the soul's deep satisfaction and happiness: To see that it gives God more than it is worth in itself, the very divine light and divine heat that are given to it. It does this in heaven by means of the light of glory and in this life by means of a highly illumined faith. Accordingly, "the deep caverns of feeling now give forth, so rarely, so exquisitely, both warmth and light to the Beloved."

It says "both warmth and light," because the communication of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit in the soul is combined; they are the light and fire of love in it.

81. Yet we should note briefly the refinement with which the soul makes this surrender. In this respect it should be known that, since it enjoys a certain image of fruition caused by the union of the intellect and affection with God, and is delighted and obliged by this inestimable favor, it makes this surrender of God and of itself to God in marvelous ways. With regard to love, the soul's presence before God is of rare and exquisite excellence, and so too in regard to this vestige of fruition, and also in regard to praise and to gratitude.

82. Concerning the first, there are chiefly three exquisite qualities of love. The first is that the soul here loves God, not through itself but through him. This is a remarkable quality, for the soul loves through the Holy Spirit, as the Father and the Son love each other, according to what the Son himself declares through St. John: *That the love with which you have loved me be in them and I in them* [Jn. 17:26].



The second exquisite quality is to love God in God, for in this union the soul is ardently absorbed in love of God, and God in great ardor surrenders himself to the soul.

The third exquisite quality of love is to love him on account of who he is. The soul does not love him only because he is generous, good, glorious, and so on, to it; but with greater intensity it loves him because he is all this in himself essentially.

83. In regard to this image of fruition, it has three other exquisite qualities that are precious and principal ones. The first is that it enjoys God, for it enjoys him by means of himself. Since it unites its intellect to the omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, and so on, although not clearly as it will in the next life, it delights in all these attributes, which are understood distinctly, as we mentioned above.<sup>29</sup> The second exquisite quality of this joy is that the soul delights with order in God alone, without any intermingling of creature. The third delight is that it enjoys him only on account of who he is without any admixture of its own pleasure.

84. There are three exquisite qualities in the praise the soul renders God in this union. The first is that it praises him as its duty, for it sees that God created it for his own praise, as he asserts through Isaiah: This people I have formed for myself; it will sing my praises [Is. 43:21]. The second exquisite quality of praise is that the soul praises God for the goods it receives and the delight it has in praising. The third exquisite quality is that it praises God for what he is in himself. Even though the soul would experience no delight, it would praise him because of who he is.

85. As for gratitude, it has three other exquisite qualities. The first is gratefulness for the natural and spiritual goods and blessings it has received. The second is the intense delight it has in praising God, for it is absorbed with extreme ardor in this praise. The third is praise only because of what God is, which is a much stronger and more delightful praise.

---

[Back to Index](#)

## STANZA 4

How gently and lovingly  
you wake in my heart,  
where in secret you dwell alone;  
and in your sweet breathing,  
filled with good and glory,  
how tenderly you swell my heart with love.

### Commentary

1. The soul here addresses its Bridegroom with deep love, esteeming him and thanking him for two admirable effects sometimes produced by him through this union, noting also the manner in which each is wrought, as well as another effect that overflows in it from this union.

2. The first effect is an awakening of God in the soul, brought about in gentleness and love. The second is the breathing of God within it, and this is brought about through the good and glory communicated to it in this breathing. And what overflows in it is its being tenderly and delicately inspired with love.

3. And thus it is as though the soul were to say: How gentle and loving (that is, extremely loving and gentle) is your awakening, O Bridegroom Word, in the center and depth of my soul, which is its pure and intimate substance, in which secretly and silently, as its only lord, you dwell alone, not only as in your house, nor only as in your bed, but also as in my own heart, intimately and closely united to it. And how delicately you captivate me and arouse my affections toward you in the sweet breathing you produce in this awakening, a breathing delightful to me and full of good and glory. The soul uses this comparison because its experience here is similar to that of one who on awakening breathes deeply. The verses follow:

How gently and lovingly  
you wake in my heart,

4. There are many kinds of awakening that God effects in the soul, so many that we would never finish explaining them all. Yet this awakening of the Son of God that the soul wishes to refer to here is one of the most elevated and beneficial. For this awakening is a movement of the Word in the substance of the soul, containing such grandeur, dominion, glory, and intimate sweetness that it seems to the soul that all the balsams and fragrant spices and flowers of the world are commingled, stirred, and shaken so as to yield their sweet odor, and all the kingdoms and dominions of the world and all the powers and virtues of heaven are moved; not only this, but it also seems that all the virtues and substances and perfections and graces of every created thing glow and make the same movement all at once.

Since, as St. John says, all things in him are life [Jn. 1:3-4], and in him they live and are and move, as the Apostle declares [Acts 17:28], it follows that when, within the soul, this great Emperor moves (whose principality, as Isaiah says, he bears on his shoulders [Is. 9:6] - which consists of the three spheres, celestial, terrestrial, and infernal [Phil. 2:10], and the things contained in them - upholding them all, as St. Paul says

[Heb. 1:3], with the word of his power), all things seem to move in unison.

This happens in the same manner as when at the movement of the earth all material things in it move as though they were nothing. So it is when this Prince moves, who himself carries his court, instead of his court carrying him.<sup>1</sup>

5. Even this comparison is most inadequate; for in this awakening they not only seem to move, but they all likewise disclose the beauties of their being, power, loveliness, and graces, and the root of their duration and life. For the soul is conscious of how all creatures, earthly and heavenly, have their life, duration, and strength in him, and it clearly realizes what he says in the Book of Proverbs: By me kings reign and princes rule and the mighty exercise justice and understand it [Prv. 8:15-16]. Although it is indeed aware that these things are distinct from God, insofar as they have created being, nonetheless what it understands of God, by his being all these things with infinite eminence, is such that it knows these things better in God's being than in themselves.

And here lies the remarkable delight of this awakening: The soul knows creatures through God and not God through creatures. This amounts to knowing the effects through their cause and not the cause through its effects. The latter is knowledge a posteriori, and the former is essential knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

6. How this movement takes place in the soul, since God is immovable, is a wonderful thing, for it seems to the soul that God indeed moves; yet he does not really move. For since it is the soul that is renewed and moved by God so it might behold this supernatural sight, and since divine life and the being and harmony of every creature in that life, with its movements in God, is revealed to it with such newness, it seems to the soul that it is God who moves and the cause assumes the name of the effect it produces. According to this effect, we can assert that God moves, as the Wise Man says: For wisdom is more movable than all movable things [Wis. 7:24]. And this is not because she moves but because she is the principle and root of all movement. Remaining in herself the same, as he goes on to say, she renews all things [Wis. 7:27]. Thus what he wishes to say in this passage is that wisdom is more active than all active things. We then ought to say that in this movement it is the soul that is moved and awakened from the sleep of natural vision to supernatural vision. Hence it very adequately uses the term "awakening."

7. Yet God always acts in this way - as the soul is able to see - moving, governing, bestowing being, power, graces, and gifts on all creatures, bearing them all in himself by his power, presence, and substance. And the soul sees what God is in himself and what he is in his creatures in only one view, just as one who in opening the door of a palace beholds in one act the eminence of the person who dwells inside together with what that sovereign is doing.

Therefore what I understand about how God effects this awakening and view given to the soul (which is in him substantially as is every creature) is that he removes some of the many veils and curtains hanging in front of it so that it might get a glimmer of him as he is. And then that countenance of his, full of graces, becomes partially and vaguely discernible, for not all the veils are removed. Because all things are moving by his power, what he is doing is evident as well, so he seems to move in them and they in him with continual movement. Hence it seems to the soul that, in being itself moved and awakened, it was God who moved and awakened.

8. Such is the lowliness of our condition in this life; for we think others are like ourselves and we judge others according to what we ourselves are, since our judgment arises from within us and not outside us. Thus the thief thinks others also steal; and the lustful think others are lustful too; and the malicious think others also bear malice, their judgment stemming from their own malice; and the good think well of others, for their judgment flows from the goodness of their own thoughts; and to those who are careless and asleep, it seems that others are too.

Hence it is that when we are careless and asleep in God's presence, it seems to us it is God who is asleep and neglectful of us, as is seen in psalm 43 where David calls to him: Arise, Lord, why do you sleep? Arise [Ps.

44:23]. He attributed to God what is characteristic of humans, for since they are the ones who are fallen and asleep, he tells God to arise and awaken; although he who watches over Israel never sleeps [Ps. 121:4].

9. Yet, since everything in human beings comes from God, and they of themselves can do nothing good [Jas. 1:17], it is rightly asserted that our awakening is an awakening of God and our rising is God's rising. It is as though David were to say: Let us arise and be awakened twice, because we are doubly asleep and fallen. Since the soul was in a sleep from which it could never awaken itself, and only God could open its eyes and cause this awakening, it very appropriately calls this an awakening of God, saying: "You wake in my heart."

Awaken and enlighten us, my Lord, so we might know and love the blessings that you ever propose to us, and we might understand that you have moved to bestow favors on us and have remembered us.

10. What a person knows and experiences of God in this awakening is entirely beyond words. Since this awakening is the communication of God's excellence to the substance of the soul, which is its heart referred to in the verse, an immense, powerful voice sounds in it, the voice of a multitude of excellences, of thousands of virtues in God, infinite in number.<sup>3</sup> The soul is established in them, terribly and solidly set in array in them like an army [Sg. 6:4], and made gentle and charming with all the gentleness and charm of creatures.

11. Yet a doubt will arise: How can a soul endure so forcible a communication in the weakness of the flesh? For in point of fact it does not have the capacity and strength to undergo so much without dying. Merely at the sight of King Ahasuerus clothed in royal garments and resplendent with gold and precious stones, seated awesomely on his throne, Queen Esther feared so much that she fainted. She confesses there that she fainted because of the fear his great glory caused her, for he appeared like an angel and his countenance was full of graces [Est. 15:9-17]. When glory does not glorify, it weighs heavily on the one who beholds it. But what greater reason does the soul have for fainting in this awakening; it does not see an angel but God, his countenance filled with the graces of all creatures, awesome in power and glory, and with the voice of a multitude of excellences. Job says of this communication: When we have heard scarcely a drop of his voice, who will be able to endure the greatness of his thunder? [Jb. 26:14]. And in another place he declares: I do not desire that he commune and deal with me with much strength lest he overwhelm me by the weight of his grandeur [Jb. 23:6].

12. There are two reasons a person does not faint or become afraid in this awakening that is so powerful and glorious.

First, the soul that is in this state of perfection, in which the lower part is highly purged and in conformity with the spirit, does not feel the pain and detriment commonly experienced by souls unpurged in their spirit and senses and undisposed to receive spiritual communications. Yet this is insufficient to prevent the suffering of some detriment in the presence of such grandeur and glory. Even though what is of nature may be very pure, this communication would nevertheless overwhelm it by exceeding it, as would an object that causes intense physical sensation overwhelm its respective faculty. The passage of Job we referred to has this meaning.

The second reason is the important one; it is what the soul mentions in the first verse, that is, that he shows himself gently. As God shows the soul grandeur and glory in order to exalt and favor it, he aids it so no detriment is done, fortifying what is natural and unveiling his grandeur gently and with love, without using the natural, so that a person does not know whether this happens in the body or out of it [2 Cor. 12:2]. He who with his right hand fortified Moses, so his glory could be seen by him, can do this very easily [Ex. 33:22].

Thus the soul experiences in him as much gentleness and love as it does power and dominion and grandeur, for everything in God is one. The delight is strong; and the protection is strong in gentleness and love so the soul might endure the strong delight, and instead of fainting stand powerful and strong. If Esther fainted, it was because the king did not at first show himself to her favorably, but, as it says there, disclosed

with burning eyes the furor of his heart [Est. 15:7]. Yet she came to herself after he favored her, held out his scepter and touched her with it, and embraced her and told her that he was her brother and not to fear [Est. 15:8-12].

13. The soul no longer fears, since from henceforth the King of heaven acts in a friendly way toward it, as its brother and equal. In revealing his powerful strength and his good love to it in gentleness and not in furor, he communicates strength and love to it from his heart, going out to it from his throne, which is the soul itself, like the Bridegroom from his bridal chamber [Ps. 19:5], where he was hidden and turned toward it, touching it with his scepter and embracing it as a brother. There we find the royal garments and their fragrance, which are God's admirable virtues; there, the splendor of gold, which is charity; there, the glittering of the precious stones of knowledge of the higher and lower substances; there, the face of the Word, full of graces, which shines on the queen, which is the soul, and clothes it in such fashion that, transformed in these attributes of the heavenly King, it is aware of having become a queen, and that what David says of the queen in the Psalm can indeed be said of it: The queen stood at the right in garments of gold and surrounded with variety [Ps. 45:9]. Since all this occurs in the intimate substance of the soul, it adds:

where in secret you dwell alone;

14. The soul says he dwells in its heart in secret because this sweet embrace is wrought in the depths of its substance.

It should be known that God dwells secretly in all souls and is hidden in their substance, for otherwise they would not last. Yet there is a difference, a great difference, in his dwelling in them. In some souls he dwells alone, and in others he does not dwell alone. Abiding in some he is pleased; and in others, he is displeased. He lives in some as though in his own house, commanding and ruling everything; and in others as though a stranger in a strange house, where they do not permit him to give orders or do anything.

It is in the soul in which less of its own appetites and pleasures dwell where he dwells more alone, more pleased, and more as though in his own house, ruling and governing it. And he dwells more in secret, the more he dwells alone. Thus in this soul in which neither any appetite nor other images or forms nor any affections for created things dwell, the Beloved dwells secretly with an embrace so much closer, more intimate and interior, the purer and more alone the soul is to everything other than God. His dwelling is in secret, then, because the devil cannot reach the area of this embrace, nor can the human intellect understand how it occurs.

Yet it is not secret to the soul itself that has attained this perfection, for within itself it has the experience of this intimate embrace. It does not, however, always experience these awakenings; for when the Beloved produces them, it seems to the soul that he is awakening in its heart, where before he remained as though asleep. Although it was experiencing and enjoying him, this took place as with a loved one who is asleep, for knowledge and love are not communicated mutually while one is still asleep.

15. Oh, how happy is this soul, which ever experiences God resting and reposing within it! Oh, how fitting it is for it to withdraw from things, flee from business matters, and live in immense tranquility, so that it may not, even with the slightest speck of dust or noise, disturb or trouble its heart where the Beloved dwells.

He is usually there, in this embrace with his bride, as though asleep in the substance of the soul. And it is very well aware of him and ordinarily enjoys him. Were he always awake within it, communicating knowledge and love, it would already be in glory. For if, when he does waken, scarcely opening his eyes, he has such an effect on the soul, what would things be like were he ordinarily in it fully awake?

16. Although he is not displeased with other souls that have not reached this union, for after all they are in the state of grace, yet insofar as they are not well disposed his dwelling is secret to them, even though he does

dwell in them. They do not experience him ordinarily, except when he grants them some delightful awakening. But such an awakening is not of this kind and high quality, nor is it comparable to these or as secret to the intellect and the devil, which are still able to understand something through the movements of the senses. For the senses are not fully annihilated until the soul reaches this union, and they still have some activity and movements concerning the spiritual, since they are not yet totally spiritual.

But in this awakening of the Bridegroom in the perfect soul, everything that occurs and is caused is perfect, for he is the cause of it all. And in that awakening, which is as though one were to waken and breathe, the soul feels a strange delight in the breathing of the Holy Spirit in God, in which it is sovereignly glorified and taken with love. Hence it says in the subsequent verses:

and in your sweet breathing,  
filled with good and glory,  
how tenderly you swell my heart with love!

17. I do not desire to speak of this spiration, filled for the soul with good and glory and delicate love of God, for I am aware of being incapable of doing so; and were I to try, it might seem less than it is. It is a spiration that God produces in the soul, in which, by that awakening of lofty knowledge of the Godhead, he breathes the Holy Spirit in it in the same proportion as its knowledge and understanding of him, absorbing it most profoundly in the Holy Spirit, rousing its love with a divine exquisite quality and delicacy according to what it beholds in him. Since the breathing is filled with good and glory, the Holy Spirit, through this breathing, filled the soul with good and glory in which he enkindled it in love of himself, indescribably and incomprehensibly, in the depths of God, to whom be honor and glory forever and ever.

Amen.

---

[Back to Index](#)